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FOOTING THE BILL:  
AN EMPIRICAL LOOK AT THE CORRELATION BETWEEN CAMPAIGN  
CONTRIBUTIONS AND COUNCILOR VOTES ON SPLIT TAX RATES IN  
MASSACHUSETTS

A Thesis Presented

By

TRISTAN LALIBERTE

Submitted to the Graduate School of the University of  
Massachusetts Amherst in Partial fulfillment of the requirements  
for the degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

May 2020

Political Science

**FOOTING THE BILL:**

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CONTRIBUTIONS AND COUNCILOR VOTES ON SPLIT TAX RATES IN  
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TRISTAN LALIBERTE

Approved as to style and content by:

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Justin Gross, Chair

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Ray La Raja, Member

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Jesse H. Rhodes, Department Chair

Political Science

## DEDICATION

To my mother, who used to tell me that I could go into any professional field that I wanted, as long as it wasn't politics. Thank you for being one of the first people to sign my nomination papers and for coming out to hold a sign for me anyway.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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ABSTRACT  
FOOTING THE BILL:  
AN EMPIRICAL LOOK AT THE CORRELATIONS BETWEEN CAMPAIGN  
CONTRIBUTIONS AND COUNCILOR VOTES ON SPLIT TAX RATES IN  
MASSACHUSETTS.

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Directed by: Professor Justin Gross

The current literature regarding the relationship between campaign contributions and roll call voting by elected officials has primarily focused on the congressional level. This study begins to fill the holes in this topic by utilizing city councilor contributions from likely business owners and their stance on tax classification in their respective communities. In this study, I examine contribution data from municipal officials in fourteen communities in Massachusetts as well as the expressed opinions made by city councilors in the 2018 tax classification hearings in order to test the theories that (1) there is a correlation between the actions of political elites and the interests of campaign contributors at the municipal level and (2) that municipal candidates heavily rely on contributions from the business community to finance their campaigns. Though the results are limited, the evidence suggests that if any relationship exists it is negligible and



unlikely to exist at any level that would validate concern. The findings also suggest that candidates for office in smaller municipalities are not as dependent on contributions from the business community as those in large cities or at the congressional level.

Keywords: Massachusetts, tax classification, municipal, campaign contributions, municipal campaign donations, special interest contributions.

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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

#### **A. Follow the Money**

“Follow the money.” This was the advice given by Henry Peterson to the Senate Judiciary Committee in 1974 (Doyle, Mieder, and Shapiro, 2012), to uncover instances of political corruption. Financial gain is the prime indicator, if not the root cause of what has been perceived to be corrupt practices by lawmakers. In fact, money itself has been described as the “tracer element” for the “distribution of political power” (Alexander and Corrado, 1995). The average American is unfortunately all too familiar with its implications associated with the role of money in the American political establishment. In the spirit of Peterson’s words, awareness of the financial operations of prominent public figures has risen dramatically since the 1970s, followed closely by a push for increased campaign finance restrictions. This should not be a surprising fact. If political corruption is indeed widespread, then it serves as a very real threat to the American Republic and would mean that governmental bodies can be easily influenced by those with access to capital. There is a copious amount of research regarding the correlation between campaign finance and legislative vote choice at the congressional level. Yet, however abundant research on the topic may be, it remains hindered by the field’s hyper focus on one body, of one branch, of one level of government within the United States.

As Tip O’Neill famously stated, “All politics is local” (Matthews, 1999), and yet we see the attention of political scientists captured by large scale political institutions, leading to missing information in the area of government which most directly impacts the lives of the majority of Americans. The decisions made by municipal lawmakers can

have an immediate and direct impact on the day to day lives of individuals while the results of the highly publicized debates that rage in Washington remain hardly felt. Consider the Congressman from an urban district whose constituents will likely never notice the impacts of a farming subsidies bill that he cosponsored 200 miles away in relation to the local official that personally saw to it that the pothole on their constituents morning commute to work was filled. Despite this, the subject of interest in the political field has largely been centered on the federal government.

The call for increased attention to the municipal level is as old as Lawrence Herson's 1957 plea for "a revitalized study of American city government[s]" (Herson, 1957). By neglecting direct study of municipal actors, political scientists are left with two potential consequences: either theories developed at the federal and other levels of government are so well generalizable that they may be seamlessly transferred to municipal situations; or there are sizeable differences between local and other forms of government that prevent the transfer of theories. In either case, further empirical studies of municipal activities are necessary for the field to advance (Marschall, 2010; Trounstein, 2009; Holbrook and Weinschenk, 2014). By taking a closer look at what transpires at the local level, we can gain a more complete illustration of the political scene in American life.

Now more than ever before the easy access to data makes empirical studies at such a level possible. This study takes advantage of this situation and seeks to find if a correlation exists between municipal elite action on tax classification and the percentages of campaign contributions made from business leaders within communities. I do not make the claim that these contributions necessarily have a causal relationship with

officials' decisions to support friendly tax rates for businesses, rather I simply aim to discover if there is a discernible correlation between campaign contributions and vote choice, as has been recorded at the congressional and large scale cities, in smaller municipalities that typically go unstudied. I also attempt to find any discrepancies in the sourcing of campaign contributions between large cities that are typically the subject of scholarly study, and smaller municipalities that are left unchecked.

### **B. Threats from Unregulated Campaign Finance**

In the minds of many Americans, the mention of money in the context of politics alone is enough to trigger colorful illustrations of party bosses committing morally heinous acts. Thoughts of corruption and greed coming from political figures, no matter how accurate or inaccurate they may be, are sure to permeate through the individuals' subconscious or even conscious mind by the mere mention of money in politics. The classic image of a greedy politician is one that is commonly played out in various forms of American culture and entertainment. This long predates effective campaign finance reform that emerged in the 1970s as the word "corrupt" is not one that has ever been absent in American literature. In fact, it has consistently appeared at the same rate in printed texts since America's founding (Michel, Jean-Baptiste et al. 2010). Worries surrounding alleged corruption have led to a number of attempts at campaign finance reform with an ever-increasing push to remove the ostensible influence of money over politics.

The American public has developed such a negative view of the role of money in politics that a legitimate campaign strategy has evolved where candidates flaunt their financial independence from big donors and PACs or even go on the offensive by



attacking their opponents for accepting PAC contributions. The 2020 presidential campaign has been littered with instances of candidates attempting to distance themselves from wealthy contributors and special interest groups. Candidates on both sides of the aisle have touted their own personal wealth to establish their own independence from large campaign contributors, some have even pledged to only accept grass roots and small dollar campaign contributions. The Democratic National Committee itself has helped to foster this targeting of small dollar contributions by changing debate qualification requirements (Milligan, 2020). New guidelines established individual donor requirements that forced candidates to attract a large amount of very small campaign contributions. But what is this alleged influence that money has, and why should voters care to worry about it? And are these steps/actions necessary?

Apart from a few outliers, who have the means to finance their own political ambitions, candidates for elected office require consistent donations to continue to campaign and, ultimately, maintain their ability to influence policy direction. According to Georgetown University, successful congressmen and women had to raise an average of over \$1.5 million for their reelection bids (AN INSIDE LOOK AT CONGRESSIONAL FUNDRAISING, 2012). This translates to over \$16,000 a week. Former Congressman David Jolly placed that figure significantly higher telling reporters that he was told he had to fundraise \$18,000 per day for both himself and the party in order to secure re-election. Congressmen and women spend significant portions of their time in Washington calling potential contributors in party owned call centers near Capitol Hill (Selleck, 2016). A number of news stations have reported that congressmen spend nearly half of their

workday making calls in search of the necessary campaign contributions needed to fund their re-election campaigns and to support their political party.

These extreme measures taken may be unique to congressional officeholders, but elected officials at all levels of government require continued financial support to, consistently and successfully, run for re-election. It should come as no surprise that while these essential funds can come from a number of sources, studies have suggested that the most common contributors are business owners, (Fleischman and Stein, 1998). While we often associate corporate sponsors with Washington politics, businesses and business owners have been found to be a primary source of these essential funds at the municipal level as well, contributing over 70% of councilor's war chests (Fleischman and Stein, 1998). Through his analysis of New York and London, Herbert Alexander found that over 80% of municipal campaign contributions came from businesses, with the majority of those businesses centered on development interests (Alexander 1991). This suggests that grass roots and small campaign contributions have historically not been strong enough to support the financial exhausting process of campaigning, even at the municipal level. This forces candidates for elected office to seek the necessary funds from sources that can reliably provide consistent financial assistance. It is through this dependence on financial support that we find the theorized threat to a republican form of government.

There are two major concerns surrounding campaign finance and the health of a democracy. The first is that campaign contributions can tip the scales of an election in favor of the candidate who is able to spend the most money (Holbrook and Weinschenk, 2014). In this case, the threat to democracy is not limited only to candidates who have their seats purchased through the financial endorsements of major Political Action

Committees, but also through the self-financed candidate who is able to spend their own personal fortune to ensure electoral victory (Steen, 2009). This very scenario is the topic of much debate now as multiple billionaires sought to win the Democratic nomination for President in the 2020 election. Senator John Pastore of Rhode Island once warned, on this very subject, that with no ceilings placed on spending of personal fortunes, “only the wealthy or those who are able to obtain large contributions from limited sources will be able to seek elective office”(Boatright, 2006). In this scenario, the threat to the republic lies in the inability of voters to accurately select which individual should represent them. Instead, the election’s outcome is predetermined by the campaign contributors and personal wealth of the candidates as they have the ability to provide the necessary funds to win the election. In all contested city council races in Los Angeles and Chicago between 1989 and 1999, 90% of elections went to the candidate that successfully fundraised the greatest amount (Krebs, 2001). Additional studies have claimed a strong link between campaign spending and vote share (Arrington and Ingalls, 1984; Fleischmann and Stein, 1998; Gierzynski, Kleppner, and Lewis, 1998; Poole, Romer, Rosenthal, 1987). This gives a significant advantage in the polls to the candidate that can raise the most money.

The second fear regarding monetary influence, and the topic of interest in this paper, is that special interest groups can “buy” the votes of legislators. There has been evidence to suggest that a correlation exists between the political goals of campaign contributors and the voting records of congressmen (Roscoe and Jenkins, 2005). Though proving that this relationship is a causal one represents an additional layer of debate. The fear here is that a legislator may cast a vote in a direction preferable to one of their

contributors, when had it not been for that contributors' donation, the legislator would have voted the other way. Though it has been argued that contributors are simply efficient at selecting candidates who will be sympathetic to their policy objectives, if campaign contributions increase the odds of electoral victory, as described above, a considerable threat of excessive influence over the political system from the wealthy remains plausible.

Still, there are plenty who argue that direct vote buying takes place. Former Representative Downey of New York once stated "you can't buy a congressman for \$5,000 but you can buy his vote. It's been done on a regular basis", while former Representative Bill Brodhead stated very clearly that he believed "Votes are given in exchange for contributions" (Campaign Finance Reform, 1991). Other representatives have testified on personal conversations in which congressional leaders admitted to giving in to their campaign contributors wishes.<sup>1</sup> Additionally, a number of scholarly works have claimed to have proven some level of a causal relationship between contributions and vote choice (Roscoe and Jenkins, 2005). Nevertheless, even if either case were true, then unregulated campaign contributions truly would present a direct and very serious threat to the democratic process within the United States.

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<sup>1</sup> Representative Dan Glickman "A member commented to me, 'I am committed. I got a \$10,000 check from the National Automobile's Association. I can't change my vote now.'" Representative Millicent Fenwick on remarks made to her by a colleague "I took \$58,000, they want it,' was the explanation one colleague gave me for his vote." See *Campaign Finance Reform Proposals of 1983, Hearings Before the Committee on Rules and Administration, United States Senate, Ninety-eighth Congress, First Session, on the Federal Election Campaign Act of 1971, as Amended, and on Various Measures to Amend the Act, S. 85, S. 151, S. 732, S. 810, S. 1185, S. 1350, and S. 1684 : January 26, 27, May 17, and September 29, 1983.*

### **C. History of Campaign Finance Reform**

With the dramatic and very real threat that the power of financial strength potentially wields over the American Republic, efforts to limit the influence of the incredibly wealthy should be encouraged wherever and whenever possible. The study of campaign finance proliferated in the 1970's (Michel et al, 2012) with the emergence of the Watergate scandal and a severe and deep mistrust of the government. Since then, campaign finance and campaign finance reform have remained a hot button issue that is periodically propelled to the forefront of modern political discourse. However, the 1970s did not mark the first-time campaign finance reform was discussed or tried in the United States. President Theodore Roosevelt pushed for disclosure of contributions to candidates at the federal level in his state of the union address in 1905 (State of The Union Address, 1905). Initial legislative attempts to create contribution limits and make campaign donations to congressional offices public information date back to the Tillman Act of 1907. These early efforts were largely ineffective as they could be easily circumnavigated or outright ignored due to the lack of an enforcing agent. Congress continued to make periodic efforts to limit the alleged power of unions as well as corporations via their excessive financial giving's. The 70s saw a radical revival in attention to campaign finance reform and reporting. These efforts remained largely ineffective for the same reasons that the Tillman Act failed to garner real change.

These continued efforts made by congress eventually culminated in the passage of the Federal Elections Campaign Act (FECA) of 1971. However, real change did not come until after the Watergate scandal caused widespread and general distrust of the government. This resulted in numerous amendments to the FECA which resulted in the

birth of the Federal Elections Commission (FEC). With the creation of the FEC, finally came the long-needed enforcement agent that was able to oversee elections and the financial disclosure process.

With the creation of the FEC and the sudden public access to campaign finance reports and data came an increase in scholarly studies relating to campaign finance. Specifically, this allowed political scientists to begin studying the relationship between campaign contributions and the vote choices of elected officials (Stratmann, 1995; Roscoe and Jenkins, 2005). A dramatic and sudden rise in PAC contributions also contributed to this rise in scholarly research. In fact, between 1974 and 1980, PAC contributions increased by 500% and the average contributions to congressional office seekers tripled (Jacobson, 1983). This jaw dropping influx of money into the political system, combined with a growing distrust of the government in the decade, and public access to information created the nutrient rich environment for such studies to flourish. With all these efforts made, by lawmakers to reform campaign finance and by candidates to appear financially independent, the question remains: are these actions necessary? To what degree do finances really impact public policy and the formation of the American republic?

The birth of the FEC represented a major advancement in the campaign to increase regulations on the role of money in the political arena. However, the discussion of campaign finance did not end there. The interest and even fear surrounding campaign finance and the alleged effects of high dollar contributions on policy decisions extends to members of the mass public. Perhaps the greatest trigger for increased public attention to the subject in recent memory came ten years ago with the Supreme Court's ruling in the

case of *Citizens United vs. the Federal Elections Commission* which ruled that corporations and private entities not associated with campaigns cannot be regulated as it represents free speech (*Citizens United v. FEC*, 564 U.S. (2010)). The Supreme Court's ruling as well as misinterpretations of their decision has caused a widespread fear that corporations and the super wealthy will be able to funnel unlimited sums of money into elections at every level.

Fears surrounding large campaign contributions have not been confined to the national level. In 1973, the Commonwealth of Massachusetts established the Office of Campaign and Political Finance (OCPF), which is responsible for tracking contributions made for all state and some municipal elections. Since then, OCPF has expanded to include city councilors in some of the state's largest communities and routinely answers questions regarding state campaign finance law. The most recent expansion of OCPF occurred in November of 2019, the Massachusetts Legislature and Governor Baker expanded the powers of OCPF to include a larger number of municipal offices across the state (Sullivan Michael, 2019). Across the country, other governing bodies have attempted to further regulate campaign finance. Recently the Cities of Denver, Portland, and Baltimore, to name a few, have taken steps to lessen the potential effects of large-scale donations (Holder Sarah, 2018). In 2018, the City of Denver placed new restrictions on the amount of money that individual contributors could donate to city officials (Omedo, Nike, 2018). Additionally, candidates for office were no longer allowed to accept any campaign contributions from businesses of unions. The City also implemented a donation-matching program that would provide candidates with taxpayer dollars matching the amount of money donated to the candidate, provided that the contribution

was less than \$50. With these measures, municipal governments have attempted to curb unethical favorability from politicians based on the source of large-scale contributions. From setting campaign contribution limits to establishing systems of contribution matching via public funds, municipalities have sought to minimize the theorized influence that campaign contributions have.



## **CHAPTER 2**

### **LITERATURE REVIEW**

Despite the supposed dangers to the republic listed previously, conventional wisdom amongst the political scientists asserts the belief that roll call votes made by political elites remain largely unaffected by campaign contributions. Instead, any correlation found between the policies supported by campaign contributors and elected officials is thought to be the result of the ability for major contributors to effectively and accurately identify candidates that are already squarely in line with their political interests.

If the campaign contribution is made in an effort to change an official's perspective or to support an official with a particular ideology, then a correlation should exist. This has been demonstrated at the federal and state levels as political action committees commonly provide financial support to candidates that are most likely to vote in a favorable fashion (Pool, Romer, and Rosenthal, 1987).

#### **A. Why Money Matters**

A key assumption that this study and much of the literature surrounding campaign finance has taken is that there is a direct relationship between the amount of money raised by a political candidate and the likelihood of winning an election. After all, if substantial fundraising was not a factor in election outcome, then what motivation would candidates have to make an effort to secure contributions? Likewise, why would campaign contributors give to candidates that were supportive of their preferred policy outcomes if not to aid in election? If a candidate was just as likely to win if a contributor did not donate than if they did, then there would be no motivation to expend financial resources for that candidate. Thus, a candidate for public office would seek to maximize the amount

of funding through contributions whenever possible. Though there can be no disputing the importance of fundraising in a political campaign, the degree to which it is important likely remains highly subjective from race to race.

The traditional school of thought in political science dictates that there is no direct causal relationship between campaign contributions from special interest groups and voting for policies favorable to that interest group. This has been the typical conclusion reached by scholars since the conception of campaign finance studies in the 1970s (Fiorina and Peterson 1998). However, studies have varied in the way they approach the question, in the number of and what classifies as a control used in the experiment, and in resulting conclusions. Through their meta-analysis on the results of over 357 tests on the link between campaign finance and roll-call voting, Douglas Roscoe and Shannon Jenkins found that about 35.9% of tests found a statistically significant link, arguing in favor of a causal relationship (Roscoe and Jenkins 2005). Interestingly, Roscoe and Jenkins also found that the most common form of measuring campaign contributions was through whole dollar amounts rather than a percentage of total donations. A mere 22.1 % of tests utilized the percentage of contributions coming from special interest groups (Roscoe and Jenkins 2005). Examining the percentage of total contributions made to an official that comes from special interests is a superior method as it highlights the value that that particular special interest groups' contribution is to the recipient. For example, a representative might take several million dollars from special interests, but these donations may only represent a fraction of total contributions, thus losing the support of the special interest group by voting against their preferred outcome may not be too costly for the representative. At the same time, a representative that took a small amount of

money from special interests but funded most of their campaign from those contributions alone, would have a higher degree of dependence on these funds. This reasoning is supported by the results of the meta-analysis which found that when the percentage of total contributions from special interests were utilized, 60.8% of tests were significant (Roscoe and Jenkins 2005). When just examining the dollar amount, only 28.8% of tests were significant (Roscoe and Jenkins 2005). It should also be noted that Roscoe and Jenkins wrote about the factors that were controlled for in each study: common factors included ideology and party ID.

### **B. Dominant Theory and “Ideological Sorting”**

The dominant theory in political science is that any relationship between campaign contributions and roll call voting is merely the result of special interest groups accurately identifying candidates that are most likely to vote in their favor. Several scholars have made this point when arguing that corruption is not as blatant as the general populous might expect. This hypothesis has been referred to as “ideological sorting”, while the theory that contributions can change an official’s vote has been called the “vote-buying” hypothesis (Bronars and Lott, 1997). If ideological sorting is the predominating theory, then it not only negates the arguments made by candidates in this most recent presidential campaign that they are superior for refusing special interest dollars, but suggests that these candidates have made a grave error by not simply taking advantage of such large amounts of money.

Studies that attempt to prove a causal relationship between campaign contributions and vote choice will typically attempt to control for factors that have shown a strong correlation to vote choice. Such factors include ideological views, the political

party of the individual politician (Smith et al, 2012), or the ideological leanings of the candidate's constituency (Markus 1974).

Filip Palda argues this point in his book. Palda suggests that the American political scene had been consumed by what he described as the "Myth of contributions and Corruption" (Palda 1994), and that as of the 1990's, after "exhaustive academic research [he] has found no conclusive evidence that election money buys government favors". Instead, he argues that the attractiveness and easy study of campaign contributions has detracted scholars from studying other avenues by which big money might have an impact on the American political system. This point may have merit as it has been found that a mere 10% of interest groups' resources are spent on campaign contributions (Palda 1994). So, while special interest groups may be an essential source of funding for candidates, contributing to campaigns may not even be the primary source of lobbying available to these groups. In a similar vein, John Wright has argued that PACs have been detrimental to the efficiency of the government, by devoting staff and congresspersons' time to securing contributions, rather than encouraging them to actually impact the passage of legislation (Wright, 1985), as is their duty.

Still, at the time of Palda's writing, other social scientists such as Stephen Bronars and John Lott, argued that the question remained largely unsolved and continued to research the topic using different measures. Bronas and Lott developed a method by which they compared the voting trends of congressmen over the course of their careers as they received financial support from PACs and after they had announced their retirements, hence no longer seeking campaign contributions. The study utilized special interests' indices on congressmen to determine if their overall support for these special

interest groups' policy outcomes changed after they announced retirement. They found that only one in five special interest groups examined exhibited a significant decrease in the congressperson's voting index. The overall finding of the piece was a strong rejection of the "vote buying" hypothesis.

### **C. Minority Opinion and "Vote Buying"**

In contrast to the dominant school of thought, a few studies have claimed to have found a causal link between contributing to a legislator's campaign, and that same legislator voting for the special interest group's preferred outcome. In fact, it has even been argued that campaign contributions are only rational if they *do* have an impact on congressional voting (Chappell; 1982, Stratmann; 1992). This argument logically follows the idea that organizations and individuals contribute to campaigns to benefit from them in some way. If contributing to a campaign does not guarantee or at least increase the chances that the candidate, if elected, will vote for the preferred outcome, then what incentive is there to contribute? Of course, this argument diminishes the theory that contributing to a campaign is for the purposes of increasing the chances of electoral success, as it would incentivize contributing to campaigns without the expectation of guaranteed preferred policy outcomes. Though, to reiterate, much of the literature both in support and refuting Vote Buying Theory has focused exclusively on the United States House of Representatives, and on Political Action Committees (PACs), hence skewing the scope of research results.

Another argument has been that campaign contributions can affect the vote choice of elected officials depending on the timing of the contributions. John Wright at the University of Iowa examined the relationship between vote choice and campaign contributions while looking at when contributions were made. He determined that

campaign contributions were more likely to have a causal link to vote choice when given closer to the date of the vote (Wright, 1990).

Not all theories that suggest causal relationships necessarily fall under the umbrella of vote buying. Instead, it has been argued that with many issues and bills proposed before lawmakers and only a small amount of time to review them, legislators turn to a variety of sources to impact their vote. If a bill comes before them that would have relatively little impact on their constituents, but a rather large impact on a campaign contributor, then they may be more receptive to lobbyists from the contributor (Roscoe and Jenkins 2005).

From here, scholars are poised to debate on whether the evidence points to effective lobbying efforts. Data suggests that tracing lobbying efforts may be a more effective way of determining the power of contributions. One such study suggests that committee-level voting in congress is predictable based on campaign contributions from lobbying groups (Wright 1990). This same study suggests that the lobbying networks were in fact the better predictor of congressional votes than the contributions made. Still, there are political scientists who believe campaign contributions may in fact play a role in the vote choice of elected officials but that the way in which the topic has been studied is deeply flawed and as a result, any proof of causality has been masked. Scholars have argued that it is the way that campaign finance has been studied that has led to the mainstream belief that there is no causal relationship between contributions and vote choice, rather than the belief that no relationship exists in general.

Eleanor Powell, for example, has pointed out that the traditional method used for determining if a contribution has impacted a candidate's policy position is to directly

search for a change in the official's predicted position correlating to a large contribution (Powell 2013). A method that is in search of unethical or even illegal actions, thus explaining the lack of hard evidence that big money plays a role in policy outcomes. Instead, Powell has argued that political scientists should search for more subtle indicators. In her piece on the impacts of fundraising in congress, Powell examined the lobbying power of congressmen and women who are able to fundraise large amounts of money for themselves and fellow officials. It has already been determined that PAC contributions rally receptive legislators to pressure their colleagues into supporting and or attaching PAC-supported amendments to legislation (Hall and Wayman 1990).

#### **D. Investment, Networking Strategy, and Incumbency**

To understand the alleged relationship between campaign contributions and elected officials' policy positions, it is useful to look at the reason organizations contribute to campaigns. This has been partially addressed in the explanation of ideological sorting theory. Ideological sorting faces some challenges, as PAC contributions are more likely to move towards candidates in more competitive districts instead of necessarily funding the candidate most in line with the PACs agenda (Bronars and Lott, 1997; Poole, Romer, and Rosenthal, 1987). John Wright argues that the overall objective of PACs is to alter election outcomes, rather than the actual vote choices of the candidate. The organizational structure of PACs, which places a great deal of allocating power in the hands of local PAC members, has led to personal relationships between PAC members and local officials determining their funding instead of the candidates policy stances (Wright, 1985; and Grenzke 1989). This would suggest that, instead of ideological sorting, networking and strong relationships is a better determinant of financial support.

Bronars and Lott also found that campaign contributions from PACs actually increased contributions to candidates that lost re-election, a finding that they theorized was the result of PACs accurately identifying supporters that were engaged in highly contested races. This course of action introduces us to another theory, one that runs parallel to those already discussed: that campaign contributors follow an “investment” strategy when determining which candidates to financially support (Fleischmann and Stein; 1998).

In the United States, there has been one kingmaking characteristic of candidates that appears to be essential. This is, of course, the power of incumbency. For numerous reasons, at multiple levels of government, candidates seeking an office who already hold the office have a higher chance of electoral success. In recent years, over 90% of congressional office holders were re-elected (Reelection Rates over the Years, 2018). Though Congressional lawmakers have enjoyed an incumbent advantage since the late 1960s (Ansolabehere and Snyder, 2004), candidates on lower levels of government have been experiencing the same advantage. By examining the local city council elections in St. Louis and Atlanta, Fleischmann and Stein found little evidence to suggest that there was a relationship between the amount of money raised by candidates and the outcome of the election (Fleischmann and Stein 1998). Instead, incumbency played a significant role in whether a candidate would win the election. This conclusion was corroborated by researchers Kushner, Siegel and Stanwick. Therefore, the prior assertion of campaign contribution interference may be entirely discredited.

Investment strategy can be observed with regards to the incumbents’ abilities to secure strong financial backing. There has been dispute over whether PACs, like



businesses, are more likely to support incumbents over candidates with similar ideological preferences. Barber 2016, Grenzke 1989, and Fleischmann and Stein 1998 substantiate this assessment at the municipal level, claiming that business interests in Atlanta and St. Louis followed an “investment strategy” when selecting which councilors to financially support by heavily supporting incumbents and candidates for citywide office over newcomers and ward councilors (Fleischmann and Stein 1998).

In Krebs 2001, incumbency was tested against several other major predictors for fundraising, including experience, gender, and political endorsements. The goal of this study was to definitively assert or toss out the supposed incumbency advantage in fundraising at the municipal level. The study examined municipal elections from 1989 to 1999 in Los Angeles and Chicago. In Chicago, an endorsement from an incumbent meant an average of an additional \$39,000 towards campaign funds. In Los Angeles, the difference was over \$54,000. Interestingly enough, the study also highlighted the strikingly little influence that candidate professional acumen and political connections had on attracting campaign contributions, hence bolstering the theory that there is an inherent advantage that is had from being the incumbent candidate.

The strategy of financially favoring incumbents indicates that contributions provide *access* to legislators more than anything. Special interest groups value having strong networks to and with powerful legislators, thus making lobbying for policy initiatives easier. If a supported candidate is not likely to win an election, then having a strong network with the failed candidate is, clearly, significantly less valuable than having a strong relationship with the victor, even if the winner is less friendly towards the groups policy positions. For the main focus of the research, investment strategy can be

interpreted in two ways: 1) Special interests do not always give to the candidate that already agrees with them and thus they are attempting to sway legislators, or; 2) Campaign contributors are attempting to network with legislators, and while the goal may be to secure access and potential support for friendly policies, this is done through lobbying efforts made possible through the contribution and not from the contribution itself.

### **E. Theories on Municipal Government**

Shockingly, despite the vast amount of research that has tracked the connection between campaign contributions and roll-call voting, and the immense attention paid to campaign finance in general, the scope of research has largely been limited to the United States House of Representatives. Few studies have expanded the examination to other legislative bodies. This focus on the House of Representatives is perplexing since in the federal system of government within the United States citizens are constantly being governed by multiple bodies simultaneously. It is possible that candidates for Congress are subject to strict FEC guidelines regarding the acceptance and expenditure of campaign contributions and funds, therefore demanding an increase in documentation and hence additional data. At the same time, large amounts of data have historically been unavailable for municipalities (Tausanovitch and Warshaw, 2014). In recent years, as more municipal data has become available, there has been a noted increase in focus on municipal government. However, even now the lens is skewed in the direction of mega-metropolises such as New York City, Los Angeles, Chicago<sup>2</sup>, and other hubs that operate

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<sup>2</sup> See; (Krebs, 2005; Hogan and Simpson, 2001; Kaufmann, 2004; Grimshaw, 1992; Simpson, 2001; Rast, 1999; Krebs and Pelissero 1997)

much differently than the majority of cities in the United States. Tragically, many of these studies have been the focus of developer interest, and there is, by default, far more developer interest in large cities than smaller municipalities.

This lack of diversity amongst studies was highlighted through a meta-analysis review of the literature regarding. In their review, Roscoe and Jenkins found that a mere 6% of studies examined the U.S. Senate or state legislature, while 77% of studies focused on the U.S. House, and the remaining 17% focused on particular house subsets such as house committees (Roscoe and Jenkins 2005). It is astonishing that a subject of such widespread discussion and influence has been so severely handicapped in academia by such a narrow focus. As a result, we cannot conclusively say anything about the role of campaign contributions on rollcall voting for the majority of elected offices in the country, because to do so would be a ghastly overgeneralization.

It can be argued that perhaps conventional wisdom has managed to hold strong because members of the House are under a greater level of scrutiny. We may find that the Uncertainty Principle, the act of measuring an object inherently changes it, is at play. As Congressmen are aware that they are key subjects of study, they may artificially alter their course of action, and elected officials at other levels of government may be less likely to conform to the perceived correct course of action.

Despite an estimated 350 million dollars spent on campaigns in municipal elections in 1993 alone (Alexander and Corrado 1992), scholars in political science have largely ignored campaign finance in local elections. Campaign finance is not unique in this regard. Some studies have instead focused on the election process alone, and not the voting trends or actions of individual elected officials. Furthermore, the focus on larger

cities rather than smaller municipalities, and hence the impossibility for a generalizable conclusion, leads one to believe that the field is largely dominated by regime theory and growth machine theory.

However, theories that do exist regarding actions at the municipal level share common components with their large-scale counterparts. For example, the belief that donors make strategic contributions to maximize “returns” has also been applied to municipal governments (Jacobson and Kernell, 1983; Mutz, 1995; Krebs, 2005).

Additionally, this theory argues that it is not incumbency that provides candidates with an advantage when fundraising, but rather residing on the inside of the dominant “machine coalition”, thus creating a “system that favors insiders and punishes outsiders” (Krebs, 2005). Once more, the theory prevails that networking plays a strong role in determining if candidates will receive adequate campaign funding from the dominant political machine in the local municipality. Unfortunately, no conclusions were drawn as to if individuals had to comply with the machine coalitions’ policy objectives in order to be guaranteed financial backing, and the definition of what constitutes a regime remains loose. This leaves the research on municipal studies with a gaping hole of uncertainty.

Machine Growth theory also suggests that municipal officials rely on those who are heavily invested in land use such as those involved in real estate or large-scale development for much of their campaign resources (Logan and Molotch 1987).

Scholars have, to a large degree, failed to examine the campaign finance aspect of the relationship between special interests and elected officials (Fleischmann and Stein 1998: 674). Furthermore, the attention that has been paid has mostly focused on large cities with populations of over several hundred thousand people with some studies

focusing on major metropolises such as New York City, London, Chicago, and Los Angeles. Geographic political differences aside, it is difficult to claim that a result found New York City, population 8.6 million, comparable to the town of Montague, Massachusetts, population 8.2 thousand or to the numerous suburban areas that make up large swaths of the country.

The research that has been done has suggested that the largest contributions to candidates come from businesses and business interests (Fleischmann and Stein 1998). This would seemingly allude to the theory that municipal candidates seeking to fundraise in order to better their chances for electoral success must invest their efforts in receiving the support of the business community. Additionally, this would also suggest that candidates who did win elections would be better connected to the business community.

These studies have little generalizability outside of the time period and individual municipalities in which they were conducted. Campaigning for municipal seats in the megacities of London, New York City, and Chicago is simply not comparable to the vast majority of local municipal races. For example, Mayor Bloomberg's \$109 million reelection campaign (Best Shaun, 2009) cannot be directly compared to a local school board race in a small community that barely tops a few thousand dollars. The discrepancies in campaign finance even in much smaller cities can vary widely. As of 2018, the average incumbent city councilor in the city of Boston, population 685,094, raised roughly \$224,808 per year that they served on the city council.<sup>3</sup> The next closest amongst the 14 largest cities in Massachusetts, the City of Quincy, is almost a quarter of

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<sup>3</sup> Average annual donations per year calculated by finding the average of the sum of total contributions made to each councilor divided by the number of years that councilor served in the dataset created herein.

that amount. In the City of Quincy, population 94,166, with \$60,270 per councilor per year. To put the amount raised by city councilors in Boston into perspective, the average for each city councilor in the 14 most populous municipalities in Massachusetts is about \$36,138. Even Boston pales in comparison to the major metropolises with populations in the millions.

Perhaps a reason that studying the actions of elites at municipal levels has been largely ignored in comparison to studies at the state and national level is that these local elites are not always easily categorized into ideological classifications. In most municipal elections, partisan identification of candidates is not placed on the ballot, and when it is, it is mostly irrelevant as it would be useless in providing an indication as to how that candidate will approach a plethora of issues. Except for perhaps a few major actions that can directly impact neighboring communities, most issues that come before a municipal body offer no wider implications or are entirely unique to the municipality in question.

## **CHAPTER 3**

### **METHODS**

Through this study I hope to fill in the missing pieces of current literature by examining the relationships between vote choice and campaign contributions of elected officials at the local level, to help establish or disaffirm the widely accepted school of thought in an area that has seen little attention. Rather than focus on the elected officials in a mega city, I instead turned my attention to smaller and medium sized cities in Massachusetts. This study utilized city councilor campaign finance data in the 14 cities in Massachusetts which had contribution data available through the Office of Campaign and Political Finance (OCPF). Previous studies at the congressional level have tended to focus on a singular vote or set of votes surrounding the same area, such as national defense or farming bills. In a similar fashion, this study turns its attention to city councilor votes on tax classification.

Studies that attempt to find a correlation between campaign contributions and vote choice must identify a policy proposal to observe how officials with different campaign contributors respond to it. In congressional studies the policy proposal can be defense spending, farm subsidies, or any number of factors. From here, the researcher can examine every congressperson's roll call vote as well as their campaign contributions. This is not the case at the municipal level as many issues that come before one council are specific to that community. However, in Massachusetts and a number of other states, elected officials in every community are forced to take the same vote on tax classification. This subject allows us to compare city councilors across multiple communities. This is beneficial as many studies at the municipal level sacrifice a certain

degree of generalizability by focusing on large cities that have a large enough number of councilors to examine, as in the case of Chicago. By utilizing an issue that is applicable to every community, we can avoid the heavy and arguably ungeneralizable focus on large cities. Furthermore, the issue of tax classification in Massachusetts has served as the basis for previous studies regarding the vote choice of individual voters when their financial self-interests are at stake.<sup>4</sup>

In addition to its value for theoretical purposes, there are real world applications and practical benefits to be had from a better understanding of the factors that contribute to the selection of split tax rates within communities. Municipal budgets across the United States depend heavily on revenue from property taxes and the setting of these taxes affects the property values of those in the community, where certain businesses will choose to locate, and ultimately how much money property owners must shell out to cover their municipalities bills. Differences in the split rates can mean the differences of tens of thousands of dollars a year for some businesses if the rates are moved substantially in either direction. By better understanding the process of adopting tax classification we can better understand the factors that influence how municipal officials make one of the most important decisions as a member of that elected body and a decision that affects millions of people in their own communities across the country.

#### **A. History of Tax Classification**

Every year in the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, all 351 municipal governmental bodies, without distinction of property value, racial makeup, or any other

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<sup>4</sup> See Bloom, Howard S. "Public choice and private interest: explaining the vote for property tax classification in Massachusetts." *National Tax Journal* (1979): 527-534.



factor, must vote to raise/lower/maintain their current tax classifications. In 1979, the Massachusetts Legislature adopted Mass. General Law Chapter 40 § 56, which allowed municipalities in the Commonwealth to shift the tax burden between property classifications. This law was made possible by a Constitutional amendment approved by the voters during the previous year (Bloom Howard, 1979). In short, the statute allowed municipalities to establish four distinct property classifications: Residential, Open, Commercial, and Industrial (Mass. Gen. Laws Chapter 59, § 38). These categories are typically grouped into two separate tax rates, one for properties classified as “residential” or “open space” (RO) and the other for “commercial,” “industrial,” and “personal property” (CIP) (Cronin S. R., 2017). The creation of tax classification allowed for the executive bodies of municipal governments to determine which class of property would pay what proportion of the upcoming fiscal year’s tax levy, essentially determining who will *Foot The Bill* for the coming fiscal year.

Chapter 40 was intended to provide financial relief to residents who were experiencing disproportionately rising property values. As residential property values increased at a more accelerated rate than commercial properties, municipalities argued that their residents were supporting an unequal burden of the tax levy (Massachusetts Dual Tax Rates, 2014). In order to redistribute the tax burden in an arguably more egalitarian fashion, cities and towns in Massachusetts with large and or growing commercial sectors began to adopt split rates. As a result, commercial sectors that saw relatively slower growth rates in property values would still be supporting what was considered by the policy makers to be a fair share of the tax burden.

As of fiscal year, 2019, 110 communities have split tax rates, up from 108 in fiscal year 2018. The costs to a commercial property associated with a split rate can be quite substantial as there are typically fewer of them to share the burden. As a result, local chambers of commerce and members of the business community frequently push for the communities that they operate in to stay at or move towards a single tax rate.

The issue of tax classification serves as a perfect subject to examine a multitude of political questions surrounding the actions of voters, special interests, and elites at the municipal level. Despite this, only a handful of studies have made use of tax classification and to my knowledge, none have used classification to test for correlation between campaign contributions and roll call voting at the municipal level. By examining campaign contributions made to city councilors from business owners and coding for those particular councilors' votes at their respective annual tax classification hearing it is possible to establish whether or not a correlation commonly purported at the congressional level is present in Massachusetts municipalities.

### **B. Tax Classification Explained**

This research seeks to examine if there is in fact a correlation between municipal elite's support for pro-business policy stances and contributions from business leaders and members of the local Chamber of Commerce at the municipal level. This will help shed light on the theories surrounding the potential relationship between special interest political contributions and the policy positions of elected officials outside of a focus on development concerns in major cities. Tax classification in Massachusetts offers an ideal subject for studies of this type.

Every year since 1979, municipal officials at all levels, in every city and town across the Commonwealth, are asked the same question. How should the community that

they govern split the tax burden for the next fiscal year? Though the details of the process vary slightly across communities, the general premise remains consistent. For cities in Massachusetts, the annual tax classification must be decided at an annual public hearing where members of the public, including participation from both residents and Chamber of Commerce/business leaders.

Despite taking place in every municipality in Massachusetts annually since 1979, the complexities of setting the tax classification are commonly misunderstood even by the legislators themselves. The most common misconception made by residents and councilors alike is that setting the CIP split would impact the communities' total levy. It is important to clarify that the budget of the municipality does not change based on the change in the gap between RO and CIP properties (referred to as the CIP split). A municipality's upcoming fiscal year budget has already been set and approved by the time of the classification hearing. A shift in the CIP split simply changes the proportion of the total levy that each property classification will be required to provide.

As an example, the Town of Auburn, Massachusetts, as of 2019, has an assessed value of residential and open space parcels of \$1,275,580,965, or 70.37%, and an assessed value of commercial, industrial and personal property parcels of \$537,119,110, or 29.63%. If the burden of total taxable parcels was to be divided equally, and the town of Auburn adopted a CIP Shift of 1, a single rate, then the RO parcels would be responsible for producing 70.37% of the total levy from taxable properties while the CIP parcels would only be responsible for producing 29.63% of the total levy from taxable properties. Each classification would be responsible for producing the percentage share of the levy equal to their assessed value. This means that the individual taxpayer will be

responsible for paying \$18.66 per \$1,000 of assessed value of their property whether it be CIP or RO based.

Instead, the Town of Auburn, like many other municipalities, has adopted a split rate. As of November 2018, the CIP Shift was set at 1.25. Thus, the RO share moves from 70.37% to 62.96% while the CIP share rises from 29.63% to 37.04%. For an individual's tax bill this would translate to \$16.7 per \$1,000 of assessed value of RO parcels and \$23.33 per \$1,000 of assessed value of CIP parcels. Put simply, the farther above a CIP shift of 1 a city or town moves, a larger piece of the tax burden is moved onto commercially assessed properties. It is possible, though rare, for communities to travel in the opposite direction. For example, a CIP shift of less than 1 would result in a heavier tax burden on residentially assessed properties than on commercial.

Chapter 58 of M.G.L. sets complex limits as to the extent to which municipal boards and councils can shift their tax burdens between the two classifications. The maximum by which a community can move the rate is unique for each individual municipality. No community can raise the share of the tax burden on CIP properties to more than 150% of their full and fair assessed cash value. At the same time, no municipal board or council can allow residential properties to pay less than 65% of their full and fair cash value (Mass. Gen. Laws Chapter 59, § 5c). At the same time, a municipality may not pass more than 60% on CIP classified properties. It follows that Chambers of Commerce would support movement on the CIP shift that is most favorable to commercial properties.

It is no secret that Chambers of Commerce support the movement on the CIP Shift that is more favorable to properties classified as commercial. It is not uncommon

for Chamber members to attend the classification hearing or lobby councils in advance of the hearing in the form of emails or letters supporting a decrease in the CIP Shift.

In many ways, the issue of tax classification at the municipal level in Massachusetts is a more fitting subject of analysis than matters that come before the United States House of Representatives. Massachusetts open meeting law requires that counselors restrict deliberation to an “open”, or public, meeting. Thus the observers can see the entirety of the process, including both debate and negotiation amongst lawmakers. These interactions can be unobservable at the congressional level. Voted on annually, tax classification allows for analysis of something consistent and generalizable. Finally, studies performed at the congressional level relied on either a single bill or a mere handful of bills, giving them only a snapshot of how an individual policy maker might respond to an issue. This creates a binary set of observations in which the elected official in question either voted for or against the observed subject. Tax classification provides a scale of distributed values on which we can place a lawmaker.

Councilors, Selectmen, and Aldermen will usually consider several factors before discussing the rate in a public hearing. A common factor includes changes in commercial and residential property values and or changes to the proportion of the total value that these properties make up. This is found by dividing the value of all taxable properties classified as commercial by the value of a community's total taxable parcels. As residential and commercial property values change from year to year and as new projects are built, renovated, or removed, the percent of taxable parcels comprising commercially classified properties changes. This change in proportion of the municipalities total value means that each classification may be paying for a greater or lower share of the levy. For

example, if all commercial properties within a community made up 30% of the total taxable property value within a town and that town had a single rate, then the commercial properties would be responsible for covering 30% of the towns total levy. Other factors that may influence a councilor's decision in setting the tax rate are changes made to the coming fiscal year's budget, changes in state aid, or how the communities around them have moved on the rate.

### **C. Massachusetts and Selected Communities**

Massachusetts, and the cities and towns within it, serve as a suitable representation for the average city council. The budgets of communities in Massachusetts depend most heavily on revenue taken in from property taxes to fund their town operations and services, as is the case with most municipalities across the country (Wu, 2009). As of 2010, 25 states and the District of Columbia have split property taxes (Lee, Wheaton 2010). All 50 states have adopted laws or restrictions in one form or another that in some way regulate the campaign finance process of elected officials within the state. However, no individual community in this study in Massachusetts has implemented additional campaign finance restrictions on its own and it is relatively rare for any community to do so. This means that there is consistency in the rules across Massachusetts, allowing for research to focus not just on a single city, but on councilors across multiple. The matter of tax classification, as discussed above, must be voted on by every municipalities' governing board annually. This again allows for consistency across town lines and for anticipation by campaign contributors and councilors that this issue will come up for a vote. These factors allow me to study several cities at once rather than an individual city council. This is beneficial as more data is available and a larger area covered thus improving the generalizability of any results found. Additionally, many

cities and municipalities in the United States do not have populations in the millions. The fact that every community, with the notable exception of Boston, in Massachusetts has a population under 200 thousand helps to create a picture of what happens in the vast majority of communities in the United States, rather than just focusing on major metropolises. Finally, Massachusetts open meeting law requires that municipal lawmakers deliberate only while in open meeting. Thus, there is no potential for a deal between lawmakers to be reached outside of a meeting as to what the tax rate to be. Instead, all deliberation must happen in the classification meeting, in a way, forcing elected officials to show their hand.

While the preferred method for selection would be a randomized sampling of either all municipalities or those with split rates, I was constrained by the lack of a centralized location for both campaign and contribution data. Though every candidate for office is required to submit their contribution data, the Massachusetts Office of Campaign and Political Finance (OCPF) only tracks donations made to city councilors in communities with populations larger than 65,000 residents. Contributions made to officials in smaller municipalities are only maintained by individual city clerks. Due to time constraints, I chose to focus on the communities in which contribution data could be easily accessed from a central location, in this case; the OCPF online database. As a result, the research was focused on the 14 municipalities with contribution data readily available. These communities are, in descending order by population, the cities of Boston, Worcester, Springfield, Lowell, Cambridge, New Bedford, Brockton, Quincy, Lynn, Fall River, Newton, Lawrence, Somerville, and Framingham.

Though not a very large or randomized sample, the 14 communities selected are comparable to most municipalities in Massachusetts with regard to their movement on tax classification. However, it is of note that these municipalities have selected much higher CIP splits than the state average. The Massachusetts Division of Local Services began tracking the CIP Shifts in each community in fiscal year (FY) 2003. Since then there has been a significant amount of movement in the average CIP Shift selected by communities in Massachusetts. Figure 1 shown in the appendix, illustrates the average CIP shift of the fourteen cities that were selected for this study for each fiscal year from FY 2003 to FY 2019 compared to the state average as well as the average amongst towns that have adopted split rates. Despite the clear differences in the average CIP split selected, the average rate in selected communities does rise and fall with the state average for communities with split rates.

As previously stated, the Massachusetts legislature has placed restrictions on the degree to which a municipality can shift the tax burden onto commercial properties. For fiscal year 2019, the maximum CIP split that any community was permitted to move to would be a CIP split of 1.75, though the communities of Malden and Medford had special permission to raise rates even higher (Massachusetts Department of Revenue, 2020). Additionally, every community in the dataset, except for one, was limited to a 1.75 CIP shift ceiling. The city of Cambridge was limited to a split of 1.638691. This is significant as not all communities select a tax rate from the same range of available options. This is important to keep in mind when following where cities choose to place themselves as a move towards 1.64 may be a tax break for commercial properties in Boston, but a tax increase to the max for commercial properties in Cambridge.



At the same time, the communities' style of government was not completely comparable to many municipalities in Massachusetts. The chart in the appendix labeled figure 2 shows the dispersion of communities with and without split rates by their form of government. We can classify the forms of government in Massachusetts into five categories: Mayor-manager-council (3), Council-manager(12), Mayor-council(43), Open town meeting(259), and Representative town meeting(33).<sup>5</sup> Of the 14 communities in this research, all but three were Mayor-council forms of government. The remaining three, Worcester, Cambridge, and Lowell, were Mayor-manager-council forms of government. Split rates were most popular amongst these forms of government which indicates that there are common factors at play within these municipalities driving them to split their tax rates. Population and the size of their commercial sectors may contribute to this trend. An observation worth noting but not explored in this piece is that this runs contrary to what we should expect.<sup>6</sup> Unfortunately, this pattern had to be overlooked as a randomized sampling of communities across Massachusetts had to be ruled out and cities with data available were utilized.

#### **D. Variables and Data Collection**

For the sake of maintaining simplicity, voting record on tax classification is made the dependent variable. To be completely clear, this is not intended to imply that a

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<sup>5</sup> The municipality of Woburn is the only one in the Commonwealth to have a Mayor-Alderman form of government which is unique from the other five categories. For the purposes of the chart Woburn was grouped with the Mayor-Council form of government. As of FY 2019 Woburn has a split tax rate.

<sup>6</sup> As power is moved away from the hands of the voters, who have the greatest power in open town meeting governments, and into the hands of elected and appointed officials, with voters in manager council styles having the least power, split rates become more likely. This is odd as voters in a community are predominantly residents who do not own businesses and so we should expect them to vote in their own financial interest and push to lower their own tax rates at the expense of commercial properties.

councilor's vote might necessarily be changed by a large influx of contributions from business owners. Even in a scenario whereby legitimate acts of political corruption had occurred; a councilor could vote for a lowered commercial rate and then accept campaign contributions. Rather, the dependent variable was selected to allow consistency within this study and with literature on the subject. A potentiality that political scientists should be cognizant of is the potential impact that voting record may have on campaign contributions from business owners. Observing a repeated favorable voting record on tax classification may increase a business owner's likelihood of contributing to that individual councilor.

The voting records for elected officials are retained by the town or city clerk in their respective locations. All voting records are made available through a public records request to the clerk's office. However, in several cases the votes were easily accessed through the publicly available meeting minutes posted on city websites. Council votes were coded on a binary scale. Unlike most studies conducted at the congressional level, votes could not be coded as simply as assigning a 1 to yea and 0 to nay responses to determine if an elected official is supportive or in opposition to a motion. In determining congressional support for defense contracts, a yea vote clearly establishes support for the contract while a nay vote implies opposition in any time where a contract is in question. This applies to many congressional studies that have coded the vote choice of congressmen. However, every motion on tax classification is unique as it is not a binary decision but rather a choice of location on a linear scale. The motion may be to move the CIP Split closer to 1, in this case a yae vote typically indicates a pro commercial stance

and a nay vote a pro resident stance. However, the motion may be to move the split further from 1, inverting the meanings of a yae and nae vote.

Due to the inconsistencies in implications from yae or nae votes regarding tax classification, each vote had to be examined on an individual basis. If the motion in question was movement towards a single rate, an outcome that would be favorable to the business community, then a yea vote was coded as a 1 and dissenting opinions were coded as 0. If the motion was an attempt to move the rate closer to or remain at the 1.75 max split, yae votes were coded as 0's and nay votes were coded as 1's. This allowed for individual councilors to be placed into two separate columns; those that preferred a business outcome and those that preferred a pro-resident outcome. Only one councilor abstained from voting.<sup>7</sup> In this case the councilor's abstention was not explained and she was assumed to be in favor of maintaining the status quo rather than approving the motion to move the rate. Thus, an abstention vote was treated as a dissenting vote.

Utilizing only this method for establishing each councilor's preferred outcome assumes that dissenting council members prefer the status quo, or the current CIP split to the proposed movement. However, from viewing recordings of the meetings it became evident that councilors may vote for a rate change that they oppose in order to prevent a more extreme proposal from passing. Similarly, it is not out of the question that a councilor might oppose a motion to move in their preferred direction because it does not go far enough.

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<sup>7</sup> Councilor Levy of Lawrence did not explain their abstention. See Lawrence City Council meeting December 4, 2018.

Coding for certain councilors had to be corrected. This was only true in the cases of Marcus Williams of Springfield and Steven Camara of Fall River. Councilor Williams spoke in opposition to raising taxes on residents at the meeting and argued that “the residents are my constituents that I am here to represent”.<sup>8</sup> Though the vote that Councilor Williams opposed was one that gave preferential treatment to residents it is heavily suggested by his statements that his opposition was that the movement was not far enough. It was clear that Councilor Williams' opposition to the motion was not founded in a sympathetic view towards commercial properties and as a result he was coded as a 0 for the meeting, or a pro resident opinion. Councilor Camara advocated and motioned for the greatest possible split allowed under Massachusetts law for the City of Fall River. When his motion failed, Councilor Camara dissented from the majority opinion as it did not move the rate far enough. In this instance it would not make logical sense to code Councilor Camara as having a pro commercial standing for voting nay and he was coded for having supported a pro resident outcome.

It is not uncommon to see multiple votes taken or to see elected representatives debate where to move the rate at any given time. Of the 14 cities that were looked at, only 3, Worcester, Springfield, and Fall River, had debates where multiple motions were filed. Instances like this provided a significantly more informative view of each councilor's perspective on where the FY 2019 CIP split should fall.

As with studies conducted at the congressional level, the most basic unit is the individual elected official in each community with the ability to cast a vote on tax

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<sup>8</sup> See Springfield City Council meeting November 28, 2018.

classification. In Massachusetts, campaign contributions made to any person seeking elected office must be filed and reported to the local Town or City Clerk. Additionally, open meeting law requires that all agenda meetings be posted and the minutes, including vote records, be made available to the public.

The 14 cities that I was able to include in my analysis had a total of 161 individual city councilors. Of these 161, 11 had to be eliminated leaving 150 city councilors for the final analysis. The details on which 11 councilors were removed will be addressed in detail later. All campaign contributions made on or before the date of the municipality's classification hearing were tallied.<sup>9</sup> In the case of Springfield, where the vote on classification was tabled to a second meeting, donations up until the day of the public hearing were tallied. Any contributions made between the initial meeting date and the actual vote were not recorded as they would have occurred after the scheduled vote. As each of these municipalities operates under a city council form of government, city councilors were the only elected officials to serve as the subject of study. The one exception to this is Mayor Joseph Petty Jr., who, due to an unusual style of government, serves as both the Mayor and Councilor at-large in the City of Worcester, thus despite being in the executive body, Mayor Petty cast a vote at the tax classification hearing as a city councilor.

The main predictor variable was campaign contribution data. Under Massachusetts campaign finance law, any contribution made to a candidate equal to or greater than \$200 requires that the contributor disclose their occupation and employer. In

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<sup>9</sup> Classification dates varied from community to community and had to be determined by reviewing meeting minutes and agendas.

all cases where occupation and employment were provided, the columns were scanned for words that indicated the contributor was likely a business owner or had a vested interest in the success of commercial entities. Keywords that indicated ties to businesses within a community consisted of; “CEO”, “Chief Executive Officer”, “Management”, “Manager”, “Founder”, “Vice Chair”, “Vice Pres”, “V.P.”, “Chairman”, “Director”, “Executive”, “Owner”, “Self”<sup>10</sup>, “Partner”, “President”, or “VP.” From here it was possible to determine which contributions came from those who were either business owners or involved in upper management positions and thus likely members of the business community. If any of the above-mentioned words or phrases appeared as a contributor’s employer or occupation column then the contribution made by that individual was considered from a person with ties to commercial properties.

The contribution totals from business leaders were then divided by the candidates total donations accepted to get the proportion of total contributions given to each city councilor that came from potential business leaders before their vote at their respective municipality’s tax classification hearing. Studies at the congressional level have varied in whether to assess the dollar value or the proportion of contributions from business interests (Roscoe and Jenkins, 2004). In theory, examining the percentage of total contributions coming from business owners should highlight the significance of business contributions to a candidate's overall war chest. A councilor who has over 50% of their contributions coming from business owners is more dependent on that block of donors

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<sup>10</sup> While the word “Self” was used to indicate if an individual was “self-employed,” it is important to note that in several occasions contributors who were stay at home parents also labeled themselves as “self-employed,” thus creating potential for a slightly inflated number for campaign contributions.

for financial support than a councilor who only has 10% of their contributions coming from business owners. This dependence is not as easily recognized if we were to just examine the dollar amount of contributions. In that case, politicians who were particularly skilled at fundraising in general may have higher than average contributions from business owners, but they may make up a small proportion of their overall contributions. This could also apply to city councilors that had been in office for a longer period of time and as a result had received a large amount from businesses over a 20-year career but were not dependent on that block.

A few other potential predictor variables were considered and factored into the analysis. Councilors in leadership positions were added as a dummy variable and coded as a 1 if they served as a Council, Chair, Vice-Chair, President, Vice President, or, in the case of Worcester, Mayor. All other councilors were coded as 0s. All councilors were coded for their roles on the date that the FY 2019 tax classification hearing occurred in their respective communities. It should be noted that there were officials in several communities that had previously held leadership roles. This was not accounted for when coding for the leadership dummy variable.

Incumbency, At-Large, and a Gender variable were added as well. The incumbency variable was created to mark individuals who were incumbents in the last election as, by definition, all councilors were incumbents at the time of the vote. Councilors who were serving their first term at the time of the classification hearing were coded as 0s and those who were on a second term or greater were coded at 1. Gender and At-Large seats were also coded on a binary scale.

The final predictor variable factored into the model was the change in percent of each municipality's total property value comprised of CIP properties from FY 2018 to FY 2019. Since tax rates have an ultimate impact on the value of properties and the new growth of different property classifications can impact what proportion of the tax levy each classification is responsible for paying, it is reasonable to believe that the tax rate may be impacted by changes in commercial growth. Because of the potential influence that this variable can have over the decisions of municipal officials, I control for it in the equation. Cuts to municipal cherry sheets, or state aid, in Massachusetts have been found to correlate with and cause increases in the overall tax levy of communities (Wu, 2009). However, reduced state aid has not been found to directly impact the division of the tax burden regarding split rates and as a result, state aid was left out as a predictor. Also not controlled for were the selected rates of the neighboring communities of those selected. While there is some evidence to suggest that the actions of neighboring municipalities regarding commercial tax rates may have had minimal influence over the decisions of officials in British Columbia, a race to the bottom strategy leading to detrimental economic impacts has been rejected (Brett, and Pinkse; 2000)

Missing or null data was produced in two ways, unavailable contribution data and or a missing voting record on the city councilor in question. For the former, councilors may not have had their contribution data available through the Office of Campaign and Political Finance's (OCPF) database if they had established a bank account associated



with the campaign prior to filing with OCPF<sup>11</sup>. This only applied to six councilors.<sup>12</sup> Councilors who were absent from the classification hearing were unable to cast votes. In all of the subject cities, a total of eight councilors were not present for the hearing.<sup>13</sup> As a result, there was no way of determining their preferred movement on CIP split for FY 2019. Councilors with missing data were removed from the dataset for the statistical analysis portion of this research. Several councilors had missing contribution data and were not present at the classification hearing. In the end, the dataset was left with 150 unique observations. It should be noted that the campaign contribution totals and totals from business leaders still utilized councilors who had available contribution data but who were not present for the classification hearing.

#### **E. Statistical Equation**

For the purposes of this study, the dependent variable, councilor's vote on tax rate, is coded on a binary scale; 0 for opposing a commercially friendly split and 1 for supporting a commercially friendly split. By coding on a binary scale, we are able to simplify each councilor's position on the matter of tax classification and remove discrepancies in the value associated with the CIP split between cities. A councilor in Fall River that supports moving in a pro-business direction may support moving closer to a

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<sup>11</sup> In these cases, candidates either did not have to file with OCPF when they first ran for office or had previously had an account that did not have to register with OCPF (such as selectman and or other minor offices). In these cases, OCPF did not log contributions retroactively and so contribution data along the councilor's careers may be incomplete. This does not pose much of a threat to the study as most city councils had data available through OCPF and even councilors that may have had previous contributions go untracked, any donations made specifically for them to run for city council would be logged.

<sup>12</sup> Contribution data was not available for councilors Leonard J Gentile, Gregory Schwartz, Victoria Danberg, and Cheryl Lappin of Newton, and Margaret Shepard and Edgardo Torres of Framingham.

<sup>13</sup> Councilor, now Congresswoman, Ayanna Pressley of Boston, James Milinazzo of Lowell, Debora Coelho of New Bedford, Leonard Gentile, Cheryl Lappin and John Rice of Newton, Edgardo Torres of Framingham, and Adam Gomez of Springfield were absent at their city's classification hearings and thus a voting record was not available.

single rate by 0.01 but not by 0.03 due to concerns surrounding the financial burden that such a move would place on the average homeowner in a single fiscal year. At the same time, a councilor in the City of Newton, which saw a larger amount of new growth in their commercial sector, might be more willing to move by 0.03 as the result on the individual homeowner will be significantly lower. Thus, for purposes of simplification, both councilors in this study would be coded at 1 for supporting a favorable outcome for commercial properties.

If we were aware of every councilors ideal location on the CIP split scale for a given fiscal year, then a continuous dependent variable would be possible. However, with the data made available at this time, I am simply looking for the probability that a city councilor will take a pro-commercial stance on tax classification, given campaign contributions from likely business owners. This can be expressed as the following:

$$P(1)$$

In order to test the relationship between the dependent variable on campaign contributions as well as the other predictor variables, I implemented a logistical regression model outlined below.

$$l = \log_b \frac{p}{1-p} + \beta_1 x_1 + \beta_2 x_2 + \beta_3 x_3 + \beta_4 x_4$$

Equation 1

Where  $p$  is equal to the probability of a councilor supporting a commercial friendly tax rate and Beta represents the predictor variables. In the above equation,  $\beta_{1x1}$  is equal to campaign contributions,  $\beta_{2x2}$  is equal to the change in CIP value,  $\beta_{3x3}$  is equal

to incumbency, and  $\beta_{4 \times 4}$  is equal to At-Large races. From this model we can find the change in probability that we will arrive at a 1, a pro commercial vote, given a change in any of the independent variables. Logit or the similar probit models are a common tool utilized by scholars when studying the voting behavior of elected officials.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> See (Segal, Cameron, and Cover, 1992; Welch, 1982; Stratman, 2002).

## **CHAPTER 4**

### **THEORY**

The main question at the heart of this research is whether or not a strong correlation exists between campaign contributions and vote choice at the municipal level and if increasing contributions from business owners will significantly increase the likelihood that a city councilor will vote for a pro-business outcome. While this paper does not attempt to prove that there is a causal link, in both “vote-buying” and “ideological-sorting” theories, a correlational relationship should be expected when other factors are controlled for. An additional question is to what extent do city councilors in smaller municipalities depend on contributions from the business community? If past research conducted on cities truly is generalizable across municipalities and not limited to the large-scale elections of New York, Chicago, and other major cities, then we should also expect to find a high dependence on business contributions for funding these campaigns. Even through the machine model, businesses were responsible for contributing upwards of 40% or nearly half of all campaign contributions to candidates within their preferred group. We should expect to find a similar level of dependence amongst councilors in these cities as well.

So, our two hypotheses going forward are; 1 that a strong correlation will exist between campaign contributions from likely business owners and an increased probability that councilors will vote for a commercially friendly tax rate, and 2 that city councilors should receive a majority of their funds from business owners.

A key assumption that this and other studies in this vein must inherently make and rely on is that the issue of tax classification is one that is of great importance to the

campaign contributors in question. Either because campaign contributions are expected to gain supportive votes on tax classification, as in vote-buying, or because businesses choose to support candidates who already hold such a position, as in ideological-sorting; either case depends on tax classification being a guiding factor for businesses to use. An additional assumption that was already discussed is that campaign donations increase the likelihood of electoral success.

## **CHAPTER 5**

### **RESULTS**

#### **A. Frequentist Logit Model Results**

The percentage of contributions taken from likely business owners varied widely by both councilor and by community. In general, the results seemed to indicate that business owners were not necessarily the largest contributors to campaigns. A number of councilors had accepted no financial support from business owners while the most dependent councilor relied on them for 76.33% of their total contributions. While it was expected that most councilors would have similar results, the overall average was a mere 18.13%. With a considerably large standard deviation of 12.31%, suggesting variation in dependence on business owners for campaign funding.

Interestingly, the average proportion of campaign contributions from business owners to councilors that opposed a lower tax rate for commercial properties was greater than the overall average at 18.43%. Strangely, city councilors that supported a pro commercial rate only averaged about 17.28%. These results do not suggest that councilors with pro-business positions are more dependent on the business community for contributions and if anything, imply the opposite. In real dollars, and adjusted for the number of years they served on the city council, the average city councilor that supported increasing commercial tax rates took in an average of \$8,710.33 annually from businesses while those that opposed commercial tax increases averaged \$2,902.26 a year. Those that gave preferential treatment to residents tripled the amount of donations annually from business owners. Though this may in part be a product of the tendency of councilors to vote together as a community, with some communities averaging substantially higher

contribution totals in general. For example, the Boston city council voted unanimously and without discussion to remain at the highest commercial tax rate allowable under Massachusetts Law. The City Councilors in Boston also collected the largest amount of money from businesses and overall, by a substantial amount, thus likely skewing results. This measure may be more indicative of the variation in the cost to campaign across city lines. Still, the results of the proportional analysis highlight reliable findings that directly contradict the expected outcome.

**Table 1.** Logistic Regression Model Utilizing a Proportion of Campaign Contributions from Business Owners.

Logistic Regression Table 1	
Dependent variable:	
Pro-Business Vote	
Proportion from Business	0.007 (0.019)
Change in CIP	-3.654*** (0.751)
Incumbent	-0.066 (0.551)
At Large	-0.097 (0.445)
Number of Term	-0.014 (0.078)
Constant	-3.234*** (0.756)
Observations	150
Log Likelihood	-66.316
Akaike Inf. Crit.	144.633
Note:	*p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01

The table above clearly shows that none of the variables attain any level of statistical significance besides the change in CIP value. In FY 2019, the state average CIP percent of total value was 14.31% while the average for communities that split their tax rates had an average of 21.13% and communities with single rates had an average of 11.20%. The average for the 14 communities in this study was 20.94%. This wide discrepancy in proportion of property values coming from commercial entities suggests that a growing or shrinking commercial tax base is a strong indicator of where a community chooses to set its split. This makes sense, as communities that inherently attract commercial activity can force higher taxes on the business community which is willing to pay in exchange for operating in a profitable environment. Additionally, as one group of property parcels grows in value faster than the others, it automatically begins to pay a greater share of the tax burden. As a result, communities wishing to move on a tax rate must consider how much of an increased burden they will be placing on properties that have already increased in value. But even when this factor was controlled for in the equation, we fail to find a correlation between vote choice and campaign contributions.

In response to this result, contribution data was divided into three separate variables to try to find evidence of a correlation. The first variable was proportional contribution which was shown above and discussed in methods. The second variable represented only campaign contributions made to city councilors between their last election and the vote on tax classification. In doing this, I hoped to limit any potential discrepancies that might have arisen from longtime councilors and newcomers. The logic here being that longtime councilors had been accepting contributions in some cases for over 20 years, while others had only done so in the last two years. By limiting all



councilors to the last election there was a clear start and end date for contributions to be collected. These contributions also represented those made to councilors most recently before their vote on tax classification. In this case, as Massachusetts Law requires all cities to hold their elections in November (Mass. Gen. Laws Chapter 43, § 126.), this means restricting contribution data from November of 2016 to November of 2018. Finally, the third variable only considered campaign contributions made to city councilors that were valued at over \$200. These contributions were singled out for two reasons; the first being that they represent large contributions being made to individuals and the second being that when this large amount is given, contributors are required to disclose their occupation and employer. Even when substituting the main independent variable with several diverse measures of campaign contributions from businesses, there remained no observable relationship in the logit model results. The table associated with these additional logit models can be found labeled as tables 5 and 6 in the appendix. The results of the equations are similar to those in table 1 in that none of them achieved statistical significance. However, it may be worth noting that rather than the odd negative correlation found in table 1, both returned positive correlations.

Of the three ways that business contributions were recorded, only donations over \$200 averaged over 20% of contributions from business owners. From these it is clear that business owners made up a low proportion of contributions to city councilors in each city. Again, each variable displayed wide variation in how dependent councilors were on business contributions, even in the same voting blocs within the same cities.

In 2004 the Massachusetts legislature temporarily increased the amount that a municipality could raise their CIP Split to (Massachusetts Department of Revenue, 2004).

The Cities of Boston and Fall River were the only municipalities in the dataset to move to the new extreme that year. Since then, councilors in Fall River have maintained a level of fluidity with the rate while Boston has remained at or above the maximum allowed by law.<sup>15</sup> In fact, since the Department of Local Services (DLS) began collecting data in 2003, the City of Boston has never moved to lower commercial property taxes unless required to by law. It may be the case that cities like Boston, where the CIP Split is always set at the max, feel unable to pursue movement and so they focus elsewhere. Additionally, due to its size, business owners within the City may be focused on lobbying city councilors on other matters.

A potential reason for the results shown above is that several of the selected cities have stayed at the maximum tax rate for commercial properties over the last several years. Not only have these cities stayed at the highest tax rate allowed by the Massachusetts Legislature, but most had very little discussion or attempts to move away from such a rate. As a result, businesses in these communities may be more accepting of the high tax rate and instead donate based on other factors. By quickly looking at the City of Worcester, where tax classification is always a contested topic, we can see the trends described above have reversed slightly. As can be seen from the heat map in the appendix, Worcester is unique in that it does not neighbor many other communities with split rates. In fact, Worcester neighbors only one community, Auburn, with a split rate. Worcester is the only city in this study in which this is the case. As such, the city is in a

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<sup>15</sup> On certain occasions the City of Boston has requested that the Massachusetts Legislature allow it to increase the tax rate beyond the set maximum as part of MGL.

unique situation in which it must compete with neighboring communities to attract commercial enterprises.

In Worcester, councilors that voted for a more pro-business tax rate, averaged \$37,322 from the business community while those opposed averaged \$18,752. Though, proportionally, councilors that opposed a pro-business rate relied more heavily on business donations, the difference was almost indistinguishable. Councilors that supported a commercially friendly rate had an average of 16.3% while those opposed averaged 17.1%. Worcester is not the only community selected that has moved on the tax rate.

The table below shows the results of the regression model when cities that had no dissenting votes amongst city councilors and where the council unanimously decided to stay at the maximum tax rate allowed by law. By doing this, I hoped to remove cases where the chances of moving in a pro commercial direction were low enough that businesses in the municipality would not expect to see movement and would direct campaign funds to councilors with friendly policy positions outside of the tax rate. These cities were Boston, Lowell, Lynn, and Somerville, leaving the dataset with 10 cities and 108 unique councilors.

**Table 2.** Logistic Regression Model with Dissenting Votes and Unanimous Decisions Removed.

Logistic Regression Table 2	
	Dependent variable:
	Pro-Business Vote
Proportion from Business	0.006 (0.019)
Change in CIP	-2.874*** (0.637)
Incumbent	0.281 (0.597)
At Large	-0.428 (0.491)
Number of Term	-0.003 (0.082)
Constant	-2.283*** (0.691)
Observations	108
Log Likelihood	-53.601
Akaike Inf. Crit.	119.202
Note:	*p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01

The regression results are similar to those listed above. As originally determined by the previous method, no correlation between contributions and vote choice is found to be statistically significant. If we turn our attention to city councils as whole bodies, the average percentage of contributions to council members from business owners varied from Framingham's low 5.03%<sup>16</sup> to Lowell at 23.92%. The city with the second lowest

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<sup>16</sup> Framingham's abnormally low percentage of contributions from business owners is likely since it recently transitioned to a city form of government. Prior to 2018, Framingham was under a town meeting form of government with a population just under the 65,000-person threshold. When the city transitioned,

proportional average was Lynn, at 12.93%. It is worth noting again that Lowell was removed from the dataset used in the model above because of the unanimous decision by the city council to remain at the highest commercial property tax allowed by law. Despite this, the Lowell City Councilors had, on average, the greatest dependence on contributions from business owners.

It can be argued that these results are in part because the majority of these cities approved the first rate proposed with little discussion or debate. Dissenting opinions were quite rare in general (see table 7 in appendix). So, if we instead look more closely specifically at the cities in which councilors debated classification and took votes on multiple proposed rates, we should, in theory, see more of a result. The three cities in which multiple votes were taken were Springfield, Worcester, and Fall River. Between the cities there were four total pro-business votes which came from councilors in Fall River and Worcester. Of these four councilors, two had average proportions of their campaign contributions from businesses higher than their community's averages while the other two were lower than their municipal averages.

Recall that Springfield had a lone dissenter whose argument was that the rate did not go far enough. Springfield was unique in another situation as well as one Councilor voted with the majority to adopt the pro resident rate, however, that same councilor also made the original motion to adopt a pro commercial rate. This councilor did have a higher proportion of contributions from business than the community average. For a closer look at these councilors, see table 8 in the appendix. While the sample size is

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OCPF began collecting data on the city councilors, many of whom had been members of the select board when it existed. As a result, some campaign contribution data was skewed.

significantly smaller from looking so closely there is no indication that higher campaign contributions are indicators of pro-commercial votes.

**Table 3.** Logistic Regression Model Utilizing Only City Councilors with the Greatest and Smallest Proportion of Contributions Coming from Business Owners.

Logistic Regression Table 3	
Dependent variable:	
Pro-Business Vote	
Proportion from Business	0.012 (0.022)
Change in CIP	-1.647 (1.289)
Incumbent	-0.492 (1.029)
At Large	-1.011 (0.863)
Number of Term	0.018 (0.182)
Constant	-1.512 (1.103)
Observations	40
Log Likelihood	-21.041
Akaike Inf. Crit.	54.082
Note:	*p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01

The final logit model tested (displayed above) limits the dataset to the 20 councilors that were most and 20 that were least dependent on campaign contributions from business owners. While there was no statistically significant finding from the previous models, it may be that councilors in the dataset that are most dependent on businesses to fund their campaign war chests are more likely to attempt to show their

friendliness to business friendly policies. At the same time, those that are financially independent from the business community may be more willing to vote against commercial interests. Though the table above does show that the Total Proportion variable is positive and thus moving in the theorized direction for a correlation, there remains no evidence that a strong correlation exists between campaign contributions and vote choice. Out of the 20 most dependent councilors, only 4 of them voted for a pro-business tax rate while 7 of the 20 least dependent councilors voted for a business-friendly rate.

### **B. Bayesian Model**

In addition to the frequentist models used above, I utilized a Bayesian statistical model to uncover a relationship that might have been too subtle to discover with a typical frequentist method. By utilizing a Bayesian model, we can find traces of a more subtle relationship that may not necessarily be obvious when relying on a p-value to determine statistical significance. This process began with a Bayesian binomial regression model, the Bayesian counterpart to a frequentist logit model.

From here we can see the probability that any given councilor will vote for a pro commercial rate without factoring in any predictors. We find that the probability of voting for a pro commercial rate for any city councilor averages on .26 with an 89% confidence interval that it is between .21 and .32. So, already we can determine that amongst councilors in this dataset, the probability that any one of them will make a pro-business vote is very low and instead have a tendency to favor residential properties. This is not too surprising considering the sample size consists of cities that have already adopted split tax rates above the state average and are already more likely to favor their largest constituency, residents.

Now that we have a base probability, we can incorporate our predictor variable and determine what the change in log odds that a City Councilor will vote for a pro-commercial tax rate will be, given an  $\chi$  increase in the percent of campaign contributions coming from businesses. However, rather than see an increase, we actually find a decrease of 10% in the odds that a councilor will vote for a pro-business tax rate when we increase campaign contributions from business owners. This also reflects a direct contradiction to the expected result.

### **C. Switching the Dependent Variable to Incumbency**

While not the focus of this research, it may be useful to examine the effects that the other predictor variables had on the contributions that councilors received. This is particularly true of incumbency, as previous studies have suggested that incumbents are better advantaged in raising money. In the following model, I switched the dependent variable to campaign contributions from members of the business community and implemented a multiple regression model to allow for a continuous independent variable. As previously stated, it is not clear if campaign contributions are caused by pro commercial votes or if pro commercial votes are caused by campaign contributions. Thus, the results from inverting the dependent and independent variables in this case is reasonable and is a legitimate subject of interest.

**Table 4.** Multiple Regression Model Utilizing Incumbency as the Dependent Variable.



# Multiple Regression Model

Dependent variable:	
Proportion of Business Contributions	
Incumbent	4.751** (2.289)
Pro.Business	-0.428 (2.211)
Leadership	-1.722 (2.617)
At.Large	3.413* (1.942)
Gender	0.606 (2.090)
Constant	12.808*** (2.539)
Observations	150
R2	0.056
Adjusted R2	0.023
Residual Std. Error	11.724 (df = 144)
F Statistic	1.697 (df = 5; 144)
Note:	*p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01

## MULTINOMIAL (Figure 5.)

The outcome of the regression model is shown in the figure above. The results indicate that only incumbency and at-large factors surpass the statistical significance threshold with p values less than .05. Recall that the leadership variable did not consider those that had previously served in leadership positions, but campaign contributions were tracked over the course of a councilor's career. As a result, this variable may not be a completely accurate representation of how campaign contributors respond to those in leadership roles.

City councilors that ran in the previous elections, and thus were incumbents in the most recent election, averaged 19.95% of their campaign contributions from businesses. Those who were first time campaigners averaged 14.5% of their contributions from business owners. The overall mean for the variable was 18.63%. In hard dollars, this discrepancy equals a difference of around \$29,157 as incumbents took in an average of \$40,195 from business owners while newcomers averaged only \$11,037. These numbers may appear slightly distorted since campaign averages varied from community to community.

Turning attention to at-large councilors versus ward councilors there is evidence of a similar pattern. Councilors at-large averaged 20.63% of their contributions from business owners while ward councilors averaged only 16.53%. This translates to \$25,110 for ward councilors and \$40,860 for at-large councilors. The greater dependence on campaign contributions from at-large councilors may simply be from the fact that at-large councilors represent significantly more commercial properties than their ward counterparts who may represent majority residential neighborhoods. This simply gives at-large councilors more opportunities to accept contributions from owners of commercial property.

These results are consistent with the findings of Fleischman and Stein who argued that campaign contributors followed an “investment” strategy when choosing who to support. It is important to note that this additional model was only meant to compliment the lack of findings in the logistic regression model with the previous dependent variable and not to prove the importance of incumbency. While the results appear to signify that incumbency is a strong predictor of receiving contributions from business owners,

candidates that did not win in 2018 were not considered and so the data that is used only represents successful city council elections. Furthermore, no conclusions are explicitly drawn from these findings in this study but rather this serves as evidence to suggest future studies should alter the questions being asked.

## **CHAPTER 6**

### **DISCUSSION**

The results of the models from the previous chapter clearly indicate no discernible correlation between campaign contributions from business owners and a councilors support for movement on tax classification. In no configuration of the dataset did the relationship between campaign contributions and support for a pro-business rate achieve statistical significance. Even in a Bayesian model it could not be definitively determined if any relationship did exist if it was a positive or a negative one. In fact, some results even suggested that, overall, city councilors that opposed decreasing the tax rate for commercial properties were more dependent on members of the business community for necessary campaign funds. The Bayesian binomial regression model failed to conclusively determine the direction of any supposed correlation.

Since there is no reason to believe that city councilors who oppose movement towards a single tax rate would be more successful in capturing the financial backing of the business community, we are left to draw two potential conclusions. The first being that the use of tax classification as a measure or the unfortunately skewed sampling of municipalities potentially blurred any observable link between campaign finance and vote choice or that these results have suggested that neither ideological sorting nor vote buying theories are applicable to elected officials in smaller municipalities.

The results do, however, indicate that city councilors in smaller municipal governments do not heavily depend on campaign contributions from business owners. The averages seen in other much larger studies were clearly not observed in this case as, at the most liberal projection, City Councilors averaged a quarter of their campaign

contributions from business owners. This is nowhere near the 70% plus that was expected from past research at the municipal level.

There are an unknown number of factors that have the potential to impact an individual official's vote on tax classification and where they believe the community as a whole should be. As with any model, only so many factors can be accounted for. This study was able to examine a handful of potential predictor variables. However, even when they were controlled for, we failed to find a statistically significant relationship. There are several reasons to believe that by utilizing the subject of tax classification, any potential correlation between campaign contributions and vote choice was masked.

While the selected cities here were relatively small when placed in the large framework of scholarly work on urban government, they represented the largest communities in Massachusetts. Since the Office of Campaign and Political Finance only collects data on councilors in Massachusetts cities with populations greater than 65,000 residents, by definition, only campaign finance data on fairly large cities is centrally located. As previously discussed, these cities adopted higher commercial property tax rates than the average municipality. A wider sample size or a sample that included communities with a greater degree of volatility in selecting split rates may have been able to uncover a stronger relationship than the results found. Additionally, projected new growth for the coming fiscal year, strongly influenced city councilor's votes. This is something that is outside of the control of the business community or city councilors.

It is possible that lobbying for a lower tax rate may be of relatively low importance to the average business owner. While it would be in their financial interests to lower the tax rate, the cost of doing business in their chosen community has already been

factored into expenses. This may have been amplified in the selected communities as it can be argued that they were already more likely to have high commercial tax rates. As a result, business owners and members of the business community, assuming the split rate was already out of their control, may be looking at different factors when considering whose campaign to contribute to. Thus, while no strong relationship was found to exist on this issue, it may exist elsewhere.

The purpose of this research was not to suggest that the votes of municipal elected officials could be purchased, but rather if a correlation between contributions and vote choice, which has been found at the congressional level, exists amongst people in much lower offices. After all, if a link had been found it may only imply that campaign contributors are highly interested in selecting candidates with friendly positions on policy proposals. Nevertheless, if contributions did alter an official vote then there would have been some evidence of correlation.

With the possible limitations in mind, there are some legitimate and very important takeaways from the results. No matter how the data was configured or what method was applied, there was no discernable link between campaign contributions from likely business owners and a councilor's vote on the split tax rate. This suggests that campaign contributions are completely ineffective at predicting the policy positions of elected officials at the municipal level.

The fact that there was no discernible link tells us that contributions likely have little to no impact on how an official will vote. While the results should be taken with a grain of salt due to some of the complications described here, there remains simply not

enough evidence to suggest that any strong relationship exists between the vote choice of elected officials and that officials campaign contributions.

This evidence is in line with the traditional findings of political scientists only in part as the findings also tell us that contributors do not necessarily look for candidates with favorable policy positions. The lack of an observable relationship in this case not only runs contrary to the vote-buying hypothesis, but also to the ideological-sorting hypothesis. Instead, it appears that other factors such as incumbency may matter more heavily to campaign contributors. When the dependent variable was switched, the incumbency and at-large variables were the only statistically significant determinants of whether a city councilor would receive campaign contributions.

The results of the analysis also highlight that candidate's dependency on campaign contributions from business owners is not nearly what has been suggested in studies of much larger municipalities. This was proven through multiple categorizations of the data involved and can have several implications that likely all have some degree of merit to them.

As stated earlier, Massachusetts as a state does not allow businesses as entities to contribute to campaigns. This may have severely limited the effective power of the business community in Massachusetts elections and in policy making. While individual business owners can contribute, as we have shown here, the forced use of personal funds may have effectively deterred business influence. If true, this is a finding that can have a significant impact on the future of campaign finance reform. This hypothesis could and should be further investigated either by comparing the effectiveness of the business community in securing preferred policy outcomes in other states and in Massachusetts, or

by taking an internal look at Massachusetts before and after the new restrictions were adopted.

Most of the research done on municipal levels has been, understandably, confined to very large cities due to a severe lack of centralized data. This study itself was hindered by such an obstacle. As a result, the majority of published scholarly work has found that large city elections are mostly funded through business and development interests. These cities, such as New York, Los Angeles, Chicago, as well as many others, have very large and influential commercial sectors. In addition to their large commercial sectors, these cities also have huge populations which translates to a greater number of potential voters. As a result, significantly more money must be spent on reaching out to these voters, whereas in a much smaller community, it is easier to gain prominence and familiarity with residents without substantial spending. So, while candidate Rudy Giuliani may have required sizable financial support from the business community to effectively reach the millions of residents of New York, Mayor Joseph Petty may be able to succeed with a fraction of the spending.

This discrepancy between small and large cities was discernible even amongst the comparable cities in this Study. City Councilors in Boston were far more dependent on support from the business community to finance their campaigns than any of the other selected cities. These local candidates in smaller communities can secure more funding from their fellow residents and, as a result, have greater independence from business owners. This also explains the correlation found between business contributions and at large seats. Ward councilors are running for office in their respective neighborhoods where they likely already have name recognition and less need to spend large amounts of



money. City Councilors running at-large however, require more funding to reach residents throughout the city and thus turn to the business community to fill in the gaps.

## **CHAPTER 7**

### **CONCLUSION**

While it cannot be stated that no relationship exists between campaign contributions and vote choice about tax classification, any relationship that might exist is minor and not at the observable level that one might expect. This leads us to dismiss the applicability of the vote-buying and ideological-sorting hypothesis to smaller municipalities and instead turn our attention to other factors and councilor characteristics.

Previous studies had suggested that city councilors campaign funds were incredibly dependent on contributions from business owners. Recall that studies had suggested that over 70% of contributions came from development and business interests. If this were true, city councilors would be relying almost entirely on the business community for the essential funds needed to run for office. Even when we look at the campaign averages by community, we fail to see the kind of dependence that was found to exist in very large cities in the smaller cities of Massachusetts.

Though there may be several explanations for the absence of any correlation between contributions and vote choice, there remains reason to believe that when contributors choose to get involved, they follow an investment strategy rather than an ideological-sorting or vote-buying strategy. Both vote-buying and ideological-sorting theories, if occurring, are minor and not easily noticeable, nor are they at a level that should be cause for concern. Furthermore, the alleged dependence on development interests was not found in these smaller municipalities, suggesting that political scholars should continue to expand research in municipal campaign finance outside of the realm of mega-cities. While City Councilors in New York, Chicago, and other large cities may

rely heavily on large sums of campaign contributions in order to reach the many voters in their cities, City Councilors in smaller neighborhoods likely require less funding to get their name and message out. This lack of dependence on money in general leads to less funding and in turn dependence from the business community. This interpretation is further enforced by the financial backing of the business community to at-large candidates who must reach wider audiences. What's more, the unexpectedly strong link between incumbency and business contributions should be further explored in smaller cities and municipalities. The evidence found here strongly suggests that factors relating to incumbency are significantly more likely to attract contributors than favorable votes on policy taken by elected officials. Instead of exploring whether contributions impact votes, future research will benefit by instead asking, what makes contributors want to support a candidate in a municipal election?

Regarding real world applicability. The results of this study do not outright dismiss concerns surrounding campaign finance, but rather suggests that these fears may be misplaced. Campaign finance reform may not be effective in seeking to limit the amount of money candidates for public office can accept in an attempt to prevent their temptation to alter policy positions. Instead, reforms geared towards decreasing the cost of elections in general may better serve the purpose of limiting any influence of special interests.

## **CHAPTER 8**

### **LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE STUDIES**

A possible explanation for the lack of findings may be that this particular research design did not take into account political strategy utilized by individual councilors as it assumed, like studies at the congressional level, that councilor votes were made as rational choices and not through political strategies. Despite open meeting law, as discussed earlier, it may very well be the case that candidates wishing to move in one direction or the other, recognizing that they were in the minority, made a motion early to prevent the entire council from moving too far in the opposed direction. Tax classification is a unique subject, though it was coded as dichotomous, each councilor is choosing to support or oppose any number of points on a scale. Thus, a city councilor who supports moving to support businesses, may choose to back a motion that hurts commercial properties less so than another potential motion. Despite observing the meetings repeatedly, without a strong understanding of each individual councilor's beliefs, their historic stances, or an interview with them, it is difficult to uncover if such a strategy has been utilized.

The dominant if not only method of studies that have attempted to determine the influence of campaign contributions on policy outcomes, at all levels of government, has focused on a qualitative analysis of vote record. While this is indicative of where a policy maker stands on an issue, it does not give the observer the full picture of the individual legislator's stance. While Bronars and Lott conducted telephone interviews and were able to gain some information from them, the bulk of their findings were from quantitative analysis of vote and contribution records. Reducing the complexities surrounding issues

as intricate as those voted on by legislators to a binary yea or nay vote can be problematic. There is no scale by which to measure how opposed or how supportive a legislator is of a policy proposal.

An important piece of the narrative that is absent from this and many other studies examining the effects of campaign contributions on roll call voting is a qualitative aspect. While this may be significantly more difficult to do and almost impossible at the congressional level, there is reason to suspect such an approach may provide new insights into the effects of campaign contributions on roll call voting. A quantitative analysis that includes a qualitative portion such as discussions with campaign contributors and policy makers can be beneficial and further this area of study. This study could have uncovered potentially diverse and explanatory political strategies with regard to tax classification that a simple quantitative analysis was unable to do. At no level of government would such a study be easier to complete than at the local level where communicating with contributors and councilors is very easy.

The timing of campaign contributions has been discussed in some studies (Wright, 1990). In this study, campaign contributions were examined from the length of the elected official's career, and the past two years, essentially from the last election. Though this study found no difference in results based on the timing of contributions, future studies that claim to find a relationship between campaign contributions and vote choice should seek to answer the question, does the contribution lead to the official's vote, or does the vote lead to increased campaign contributions. This chicken and egg paradox is often assumed to be that contributions lead to changes in vote choice. This typical interpretation has led to most studies, such as this one, finding no evidence that

campaign contributions have any sway on the adoption of policy. By approaching this question from a different angle, scholars may find a new understanding of the role of money in our political system.

Additionally, this research did not examine the margin of victory of any of these councilors in their last election. A city councilor with a high margin of victory has reason to believe that their ability to hold onto their elected office is relatively secure. As such, they may feel freer to vote according to their own personal ideologies rather than in accordance with those of their constituents or campaign contributors. Inversely, a councilor that has been engaged in a close election may feel more compelled to make decisions that they believe will help them fundraise in future elections or a councilor may instead choose to appeal to residential concerns. Within this same realm of unexplored predictors are the views and campaign contributions collected by councilor's political challengers.<sup>17</sup>

This is a variable that has been ignored in studies at the congressional level as well. There is an argument to be made that if elected officials feel particularly safe in their next election that they may be more willing to make riskier decisions (Sheffer, and Loewen, 2019), such as voting against the interest of their constituents or perhaps, voting against the interests of their major campaign contributors. Maybe an at-risk official will take a vote that they normally would not in order to appear more friendly to a potential

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<sup>17</sup> In the case of the 2019 City Council election in Worcester, Councilor Matthew Wally who has routinely advocated for a single tax rate faced a challenger that stated they would only support a tax rate which was friendly to residents (Johnathan Honeycutt). Over the course of the election Honeycutt raised \$650 to Wally's \$12,695. Though there are certainly other factors that play into a candidate's ability to fundraise, this particular example highlights a direction outside the scope of this study and again suggests the overall importance of incumbency.

contributor for needed funds to secure re-election. Future studies should dig deeper into this line of study to determine if campaign contributions play more of a role for vulnerable officials.

Several factors hindered this study and should be noted for future attempts to look more closely at the campaign contributions made to officials in municipal governments. Firstly, the office of campaign and political finance in Massachusetts does not have data centrally located on all municipal candidates. Due to time constraints, I was unable to perform a randomized sampling of communities across Massachusetts and collecting information directly from town clerks, which would have eliminated potential flaws in using data from communities that were already more likely to utilize split tax rates. This also would have eliminated any potential biases relating to the forms of government in communities that had adopted split rates. Additionally, the definitions used to identify business owners and or members of the business community, while I believe they were accurate and effective for the purposes herein, do not necessarily align with the typical definition of an interest group that we have seen at the congressional level. A preferred method would have been to directly compare contributors to members of the local Chamber of Commerce. As many Chambers of Commerce in Massachusetts argue for lowering the split rate and will often send representatives to classification hearings and request lower rates.<sup>18</sup> Unfortunately, as these chambers are private organizations, their member lists are not always available to the public and this course had to be abandoned.

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<sup>18</sup> Some communities in this study had chamber representatives come to their meetings while others did not.

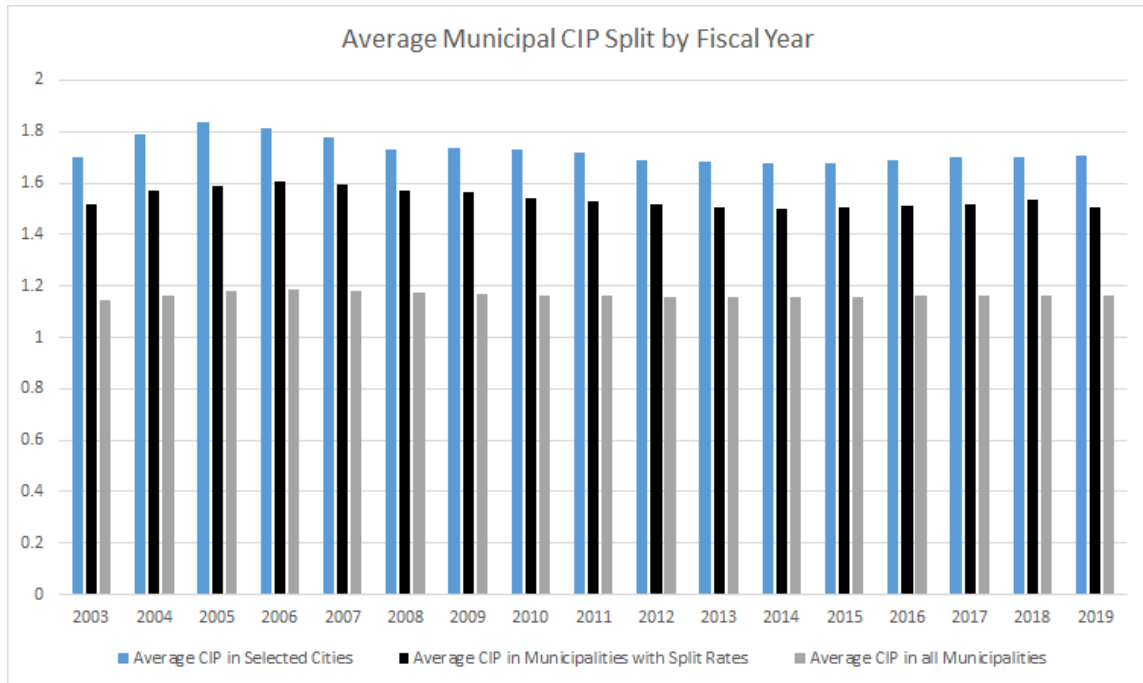
This study examined only one meeting per city, however, as has been stated, tax classification must be voted on by every city annually. A future study with more available resources may benefit from a randomized sampling of councilor votes from several cities over a long period of time. Finally, as votes on tax classification are not necessarily dichotomous, but rather take place on a continuous scale, models outside of the standard logistic regression model. Though, the information about where a councilor's ideal point might have to be obtained through interviews as city councilors may not elaborate on their intentions at meetings.

Finally, additional predictor variables could have been incorporated to better the accuracy of results. While no causal impact has been found between fluctuations in cherry sheets and tax rate adoption, Massachusetts municipalities have been shown to replace lost state aid with increased property taxes. This leads to a higher overall burden on residents and may influence an official's vote. Additionally, changes made in surrounding communities may have some minimal impact on an official vote as well.

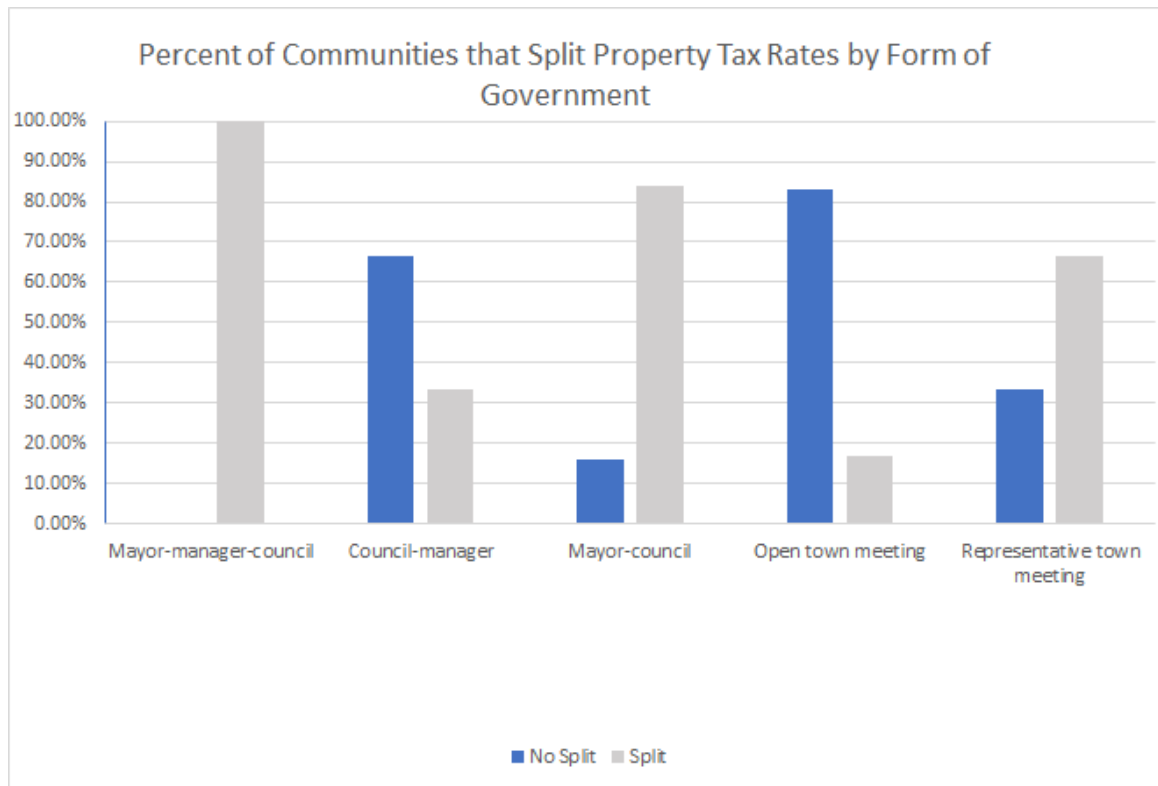


**APPENDIX**  
**ADDITIONAL CHARTS AND TABLES AS WELL AS CHANGES MADE**  
**DURING THE CODING PROCESS.**

**Figure 1. Average CIP Split by Fiscal Year.**



**Figure 2.** Form of Governments and Split Tax Rates.



**Table 5.** Logistic Regression Model Utilizing Contributions over 200 Dollars.

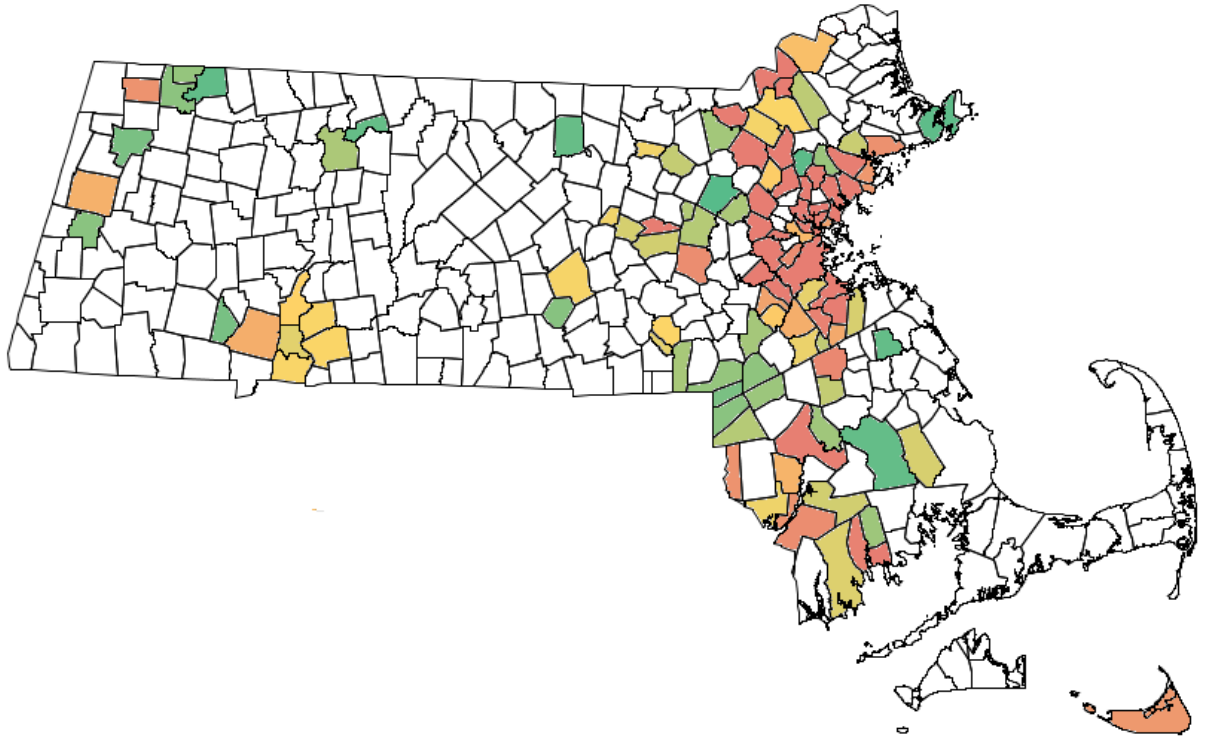
Logistic Regression Table 5	
=====	
	Dependent variable:
	-----
	Pro-Business Vote
	-----
Donations.over..200	0.009 (0.013)
Change.in.CIP	-3.609*** (0.746)
Incumbent	-0.098 (0.546)
At.Large	-0.083 (0.445)
Number.of.Term	-0.022 (0.079)
Constant	-3.261*** (0.739)
-----	
Observations	149
Log Likelihood	-66.102
Akaike Inf. Crit.	144.203
=====	
Note:	*p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01

**Table 6.** Contributions within the last election cycle

Logistic Regression Table 6

Dependent variable:	
Pro-Business Vote	
Proportion.Between.Elections	0.015 (0.015)
Change.in.CIP	-3.771*** (0.775)
Incumbent	-0.132 (0.550)
At.Large	-0.136 (0.450)
Number.of.Term	-0.019 (0.077)
Constant	-3.409*** (0.771)
Observations	150
Log Likelihood	-65.890
Akaike Inf. Crit.	143.780
Note: *p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01	

**Figure 3.** Heat map of split tax rates in Massachusetts municipalities



\*The map above displays communities in Massachusetts that have adopted split tax rates as of fiscal year 2018. As the difference between the two rates grows, the color of the community's changes from green to red. Communities displayed in white did not adopt split rates in FY 18.

**Table 6.** City Averages and Summaries.

Municipality:	Proportion From Business	Proportion Between Elections	Proportion of Donations over \$200	Adopted a Pro-Commercial Tax Rate	Percent of Council Voting Pro-Commercial
Boston	26.4%	27.57%	31.74%	NO	0%
Brockton	16.75%	8.82%	29.36%	YES	100%
Cambridge	24.87%	27.99%	30.79%	NO	100%
Fall River	18.09%	<b>24.62%</b>	20.36%	NO	11% (1-8)
Frammingham	5.04%	3.94	8.47%	NO	11% (1-8)
Lawrence	17.2%	28.48	29.04%	YES	100%
Lowell	23.29%	26.36%	32.07%	NO	0%
Lynn	12.93%	13.82%	20.77%	NO	0%
New Bedford	19.99%	<b>27.72%</b>	23.9%	YES	100%
Newton	21.97%	19.98%	27.5%	NO	0%
Quincy	23.92%	28.68%	30.25%	NO	<b>44% (4-5)</b>
Somerville	14.49%	15.09%	18.13%	NO	0%
Springfield	17.73%	18.25%	22.32%	NO	0%*
Worcester	16.89%	18.25%	22.49%	NO	27% (3-8)
Totals:	18.54%	20.55%	24.8%	<b>3 YES - 11 NO</b>	N/A

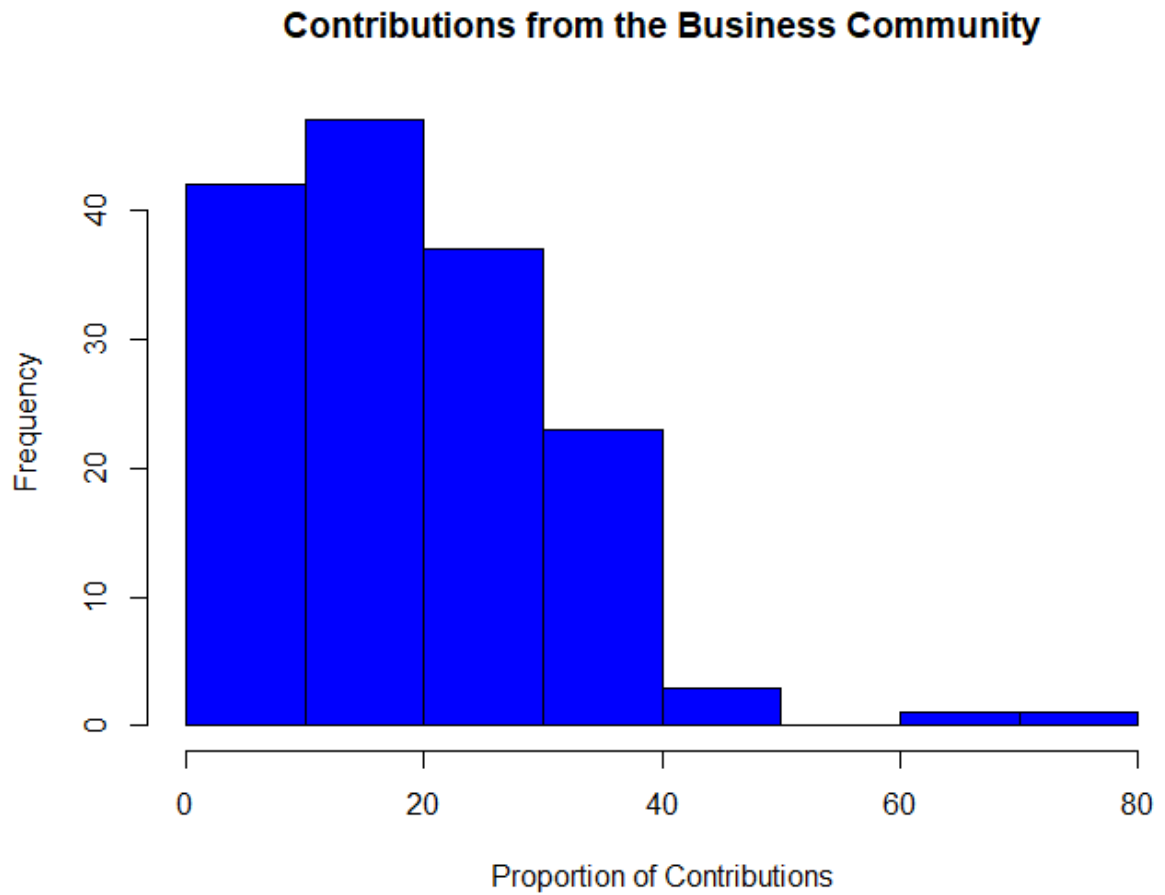
Note: While there were two proposals made at the springfield tax classification, the final vote to increase the rate on commercial properties was unanimous.

**Table 7.** Pro Commercial Councilors in Cities with Multiple Proposals.

Municipality	Business Proportion	Proportion Between Elections	Donations over \$200.00
Worcester (JP)	*41.27%	*25.73%	21.49%
Worcester (KT)	13.22%	15.15%	13.22%
Worcester (MW)	14.02%	14.48%	14.02%
Fall River	*20.48%	33.88%	*20.58%
Springfield*	*20.14%	*20.14%	20.14%

\* Starred averages indicate that the councilor numbers are higher than their respective city council averages.

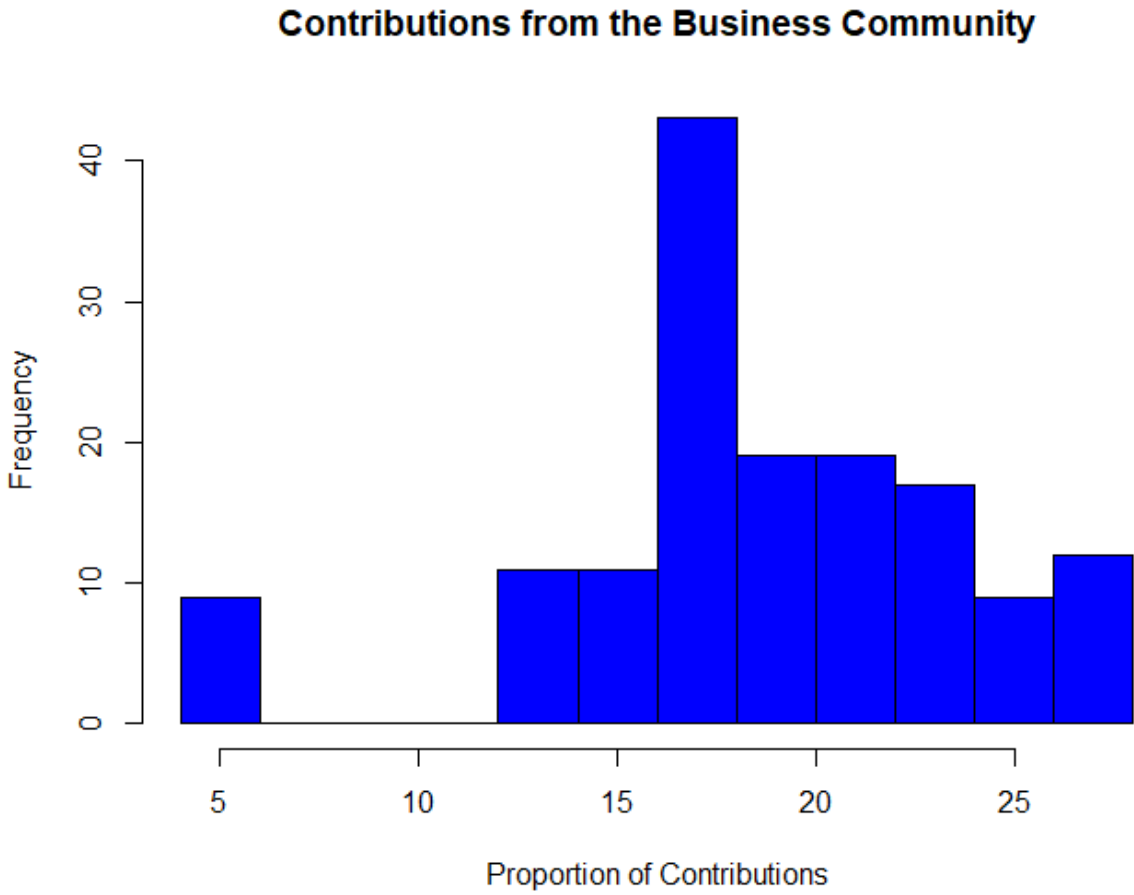
**Figure 4.** Proportion of Contributions from Business Owners made to City councilors.



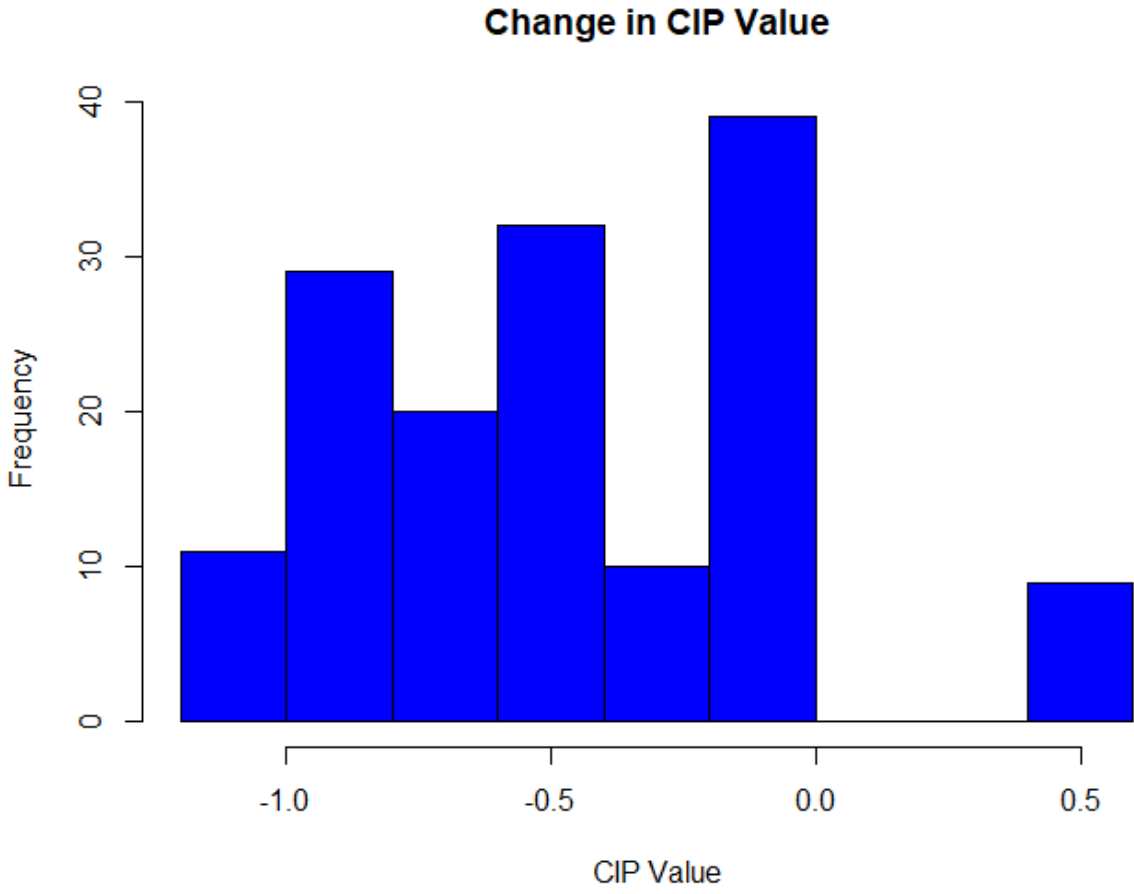
\*Frequency delineates the number of city councilors whose proportion of campaign contributions from businesses correspond with the x-axis.



**Figure 5.** Proportion of Contributions from The Business Community to City Councils as a Whole.



**Figure 6.** Change in CIP Value by Community from FY 18 to FY 19.



In several cases, the names of city councilors were written out multiple ways while referring to the same person. This likely happened in one of two ways. Either a candidate changed their name on their campaign finance reports to OCPF, by including a middle name, nickname, prefix, etc. or a typo occurred when OCPF entered the data. Every OCPF dataset was scanned for multiple names referring to the same individual using the delete duplicates function.

**Markey, William/Markey, William Brad/Markey, William B**

*New Bedford*

The middle name *Brad* and initial *B* were removed so that every reference to the councilor read “Markey, William”.

**Rosen, Gary/Rosen, Gary**

*Worcester*

While both names are spelled the same, the delete duplicates function returned two unique outputs revealing a space occasionally typed after Councilor Rosen’s name. These were changed to all read “Rosen, Gary” without a space.

**Essaibi George, Annissa/George, Anissa**

*Boston*

The middle name *Essaibi* was removed and all spellings were changed to “George, Anissa”.

**Flynn, Edward M./Flynn, Edward Michael**

*Boston*

Councilor Flynn’s middle name was shortened to M. for each occurrence so that it appeared in the dataset as “Flynn, Edward M.”

**Allen, Timothy/Allen, Timothy C.**

*Springfield*

The middle initial C was removed, and all spellings were changed to “Allen, Timothy”.

**White Jr., William/WhiteJr. William**

*Somerville*

Similar to the situation with Gary Rosen, an extra space created an additional councilor.

**Giesta, Maria E./Giesta, Maria/Giesta, Maria Eugenia**

*New Bedford*

All three names were changed to “Giesta, Maria”.

**DePeña, Brian/DePena, Brian**

*Lawrence*

Depeña was changed to DePena for all occurrences.

**Laliberte-Lebeau, Pamela/Laliberte-Leabeau, Pamela**

*Fall River*

In this case, there was a misspelling of councilor Laliberte’s name on OCPF records for a donation of \$300. Only this one misspelling was found and corrected to “Laliberte-Lebeau, Pamela”.

**Cadime, Shawn E./Cadime, Shawn**

*Fall River*

The middle initial E was removed and all spellings were changed to “Cadime, Shawn:.

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